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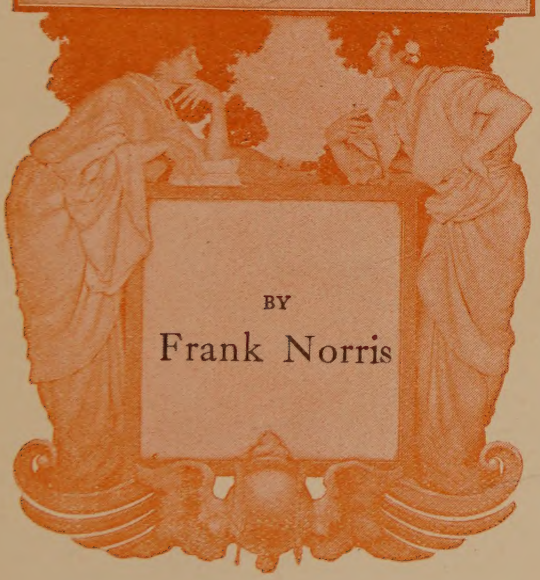
BLIX: MORAN *of the* LADY LETTY: ESSAYS ON AUTHORSHIP



BY

Frank Norris

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DEDICATED TO

My Mother

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BLIX

I

It had just struck nine from the cuckoo clock that hung over the mantelpiece in the dining-room, when Victorine brought in the halved watermelon and set it in front of Mr. Bessemer's plate. Then she went down to the front door for the damp, twisted roll of the Sunday morning's paper, and came back and rang the breakfast-bell for the second time.

As the family still hesitated to appear, she went to the bay window at the end of the room, and stood there for a moment looking out. The view was wonderful. The Bessemers lived upon the Washington Street hill, almost at its very summit, in a flat in the third story of the building. The contractor had been clever enough to reverse the position of kitchen and dining-room, so that the latter room was at the rear of the house. From its window one could command a sweep of San Francisco Bay and the Contra Costa shore, from Mount Diablo, along past Oakland, Berkeley, Sausalito, and Mount Tamalpais, out to the Golden Gate, the Presidio, the ocean, and even—on very clear days—to the Farrallone islands.

For some time Victorine stood looking down at the great expanse of land and sea, then faced about with an impatient exclamation.

On Sundays all the week-day *régime* of the family was deranged, and breakfast was a movable feast, to be had any time after seven or before half-past nine. As Victorine was pouring the ice-water, Mr. Bessemer himself came in, and addressed himself at once to his meal, without so much as a thought of waiting for the others.

He was a little round man. He wore a skull-cap to keep his bald spot warm, and read his paper through a reading-glass. The expression of his face, wrinkled and bearded, the eyes shadowed by enormous gray eyebrows, was that of an amiable gorilla.

Bessemer was one of those men who seem entirely disassociated

from their families. Only on rare and intense occasions did his paternal spirit or instincts assert themselves. At table he talked but little. Though devotedly fond of his eldest daughter, she was a puzzle and a stranger to him. His interests and hers were absolutely dissimilar. The children he seldom spoke to but to reprove; while Howard, the son, the ten-year-old and terrible infant of the household, he always referred to as "that boy."

He was an abstracted, self-centred old man, with but two hobbies—homœopathy and the mechanism of clocks. But he had a strange way of talking to himself in a low voice, keeping up a running, half-whispered comment upon his own doings and actions; as, for instance, upon this occasion: "Nine o'clock—the clock's a little fast. I think I'll wind my watch. No, I've forgotten my watch. Watermelon this morning, eh? Where's a knife? I'll have a little salt. Victorine's forgot the spoons—ha, here's a spoon! No, it's a knife I want."

After he had finished his watermelon, and while Victorine was pouring his coffee, the two children came in, scrambling to their places, and drumming on the table with their knife-handles.

The son and heir, Howard, was very much a boy. He played baseball too well to be a very good boy, and for the sake of his own self-respect maintained an attitude of perpetual revolt against his older sister, who, as much as possible, took the place of the mother, long since dead. Under her supervision, Howard blacked his own shoes every morning before breakfast, changed his underclothes twice a week, and was dissuaded from playing with the dentist's son who lived three doors below and who had St. Vitus' dance.

His little sister was much more tractable. She had been christened Alberta, and was called Snooky. She promised to be pretty when she grew up, but was at this time in that distressing transitional stage between twelve and fifteen; was long-legged, and endowed with all the awkwardness of a colt. Her shoes were still innocent of heels; but on those occasions when she was allowed to wear her tiny first pair of corsets she was exalted to an almost celestial pitch of silent ecstasy. The clasp of the miniature stays around her small body was like the embrace of a little lover, and awoke in her ideas that were as vague, as immature and unformed as the straight little figure itself.

When Snooky and Howard had seated themselves, but one chair —at the end of the breakfast-table, opposite Mr. Bessemer—remained vacant.

"Is your sister—is Miss Travis going to have her breakfast now? Is she got up yet?" inquired Victorine of Howard and Snooky, as she pushed the cream pitcher out of Howard's reach. It was significant of Mr. Bessemer's relations with his family that Victorine did not address her question to him.

"Yes, yes, she's coming," said both the children, speaking together; and Howard added: "Here she comes now."

Travis Bessemer came in. Even in San Francisco, where all women are more or less beautiful, Travis passed for a beautiful girl. She was young, but tall as most men, and solidly, almost heavily built. Her shoulders were broad, her chest was deep, her neck round and firm. She radiated health; there were exuberance and vitality in the very touch of her foot upon the carpet, and there was that cleanliness about her, that freshness, that suggested a recent plunge in the surf and a "constitutional" along the beach. One felt that here was stamina, good physical force, and fine animal vigor. Her arms were large, her wrists were large, and her fingers did not taper. Her hair was of a brown so light as to be almost yellow. In fact, it would be safer to call it yellow from the start—not golden nor flaxen, but plain, honest yellow. The skin of her face was clean and white, except where it flushed to a most charming pink upon her smooth, cool cheeks. Her lips were full and red, her chin very round and a little salient. Curiously enough, her eyes were small—small, but of the deepest, deepest brown, and always twinkling and alight, as though she were just ready to smile or had just done smiling, one could not say which. And nothing could have been more delightful than these sloe-brown, glinting little eyes of hers set off by her white skin and yellow hair.

She impressed one as being a very normal girl: nothing morbid about her, nothing nervous or false or overwrought. You did not expect to find her introspective. You felt sure that her mental life was not at all the result of thoughts and reflections germinating from within, but rather of impressions and sensations that came to her from without. There was nothing extraordinary about Travis. She never had her vagaries, was not moody—depressed one day and exalted the next. She was just a good, sweet, natural, healthy-minded, healthy-bodied girl, honest, strong, self-reliant, and good-tempered.

Though she was not yet dressed for church, there was style in her to the pointed tips of her patent-leather slippers. She wore a heavy black overskirt that rustled in delicious fashion over the

colored silk skirt beneath, and a white shirt-waist, striped black, and starched to a rattling stiffness. Her neck was swathed tight and high with a broad ribbon of white satin, while around her waist, in place of a belt, she wore the huge dog-collar of a St. Bernard—a chic little idea which was all her own, and of which she was very proud.

She was as trig and trim and crisp as a crack yacht: not a pin was loose, not a seam that did not fall in its precise right line; and with every movement there emanated from her a barely perceptible delicious feminine odor—an odor that was in part perfume, but mostly a subtle, vague smell, charming beyond words, that came from her hair, her neck, her arms—her whole sweet personality. She was nineteen years old.

She sat down to breakfast and ate heartily, though with her attention divided between Howard—who was atrociously bad, as usual of a Sunday morning—and her father's plate. Mr. Bessemer was as like as not to leave the table without any breakfast at all unless his fruit, chops, and coffee were actually thrust under his nose.

"Papum," she called, speaking clear and distinct, as though to the deaf, "there's your coffee there at your elbow; be careful, you'll tip it over. Victorine, push his cup further on the table. Is it strong enough for you, Papum?"

"Eh? Ah, yes—yes—yes," murmured the old man, looking vaguely about him; "coffee, to be sure"—and he emptied the cup at a single draught, hardly knowing whether it was coffee or tea. "Now, I'll take a roll," he continued, in a monotonous murmur. "Where are the rolls? Here they are. Hot rolls are bad for my digestion—I ought to eat bread. I think I eat too much. Where's my place in the paper?—always lose my place in the paper. Clever editorials this fellow Eastman writes, unbiassed by party prejudice—unbiassed—unbiassed." His voice died to a whisper.

The breakfast proceeded, Travis supervising everything that went forward, even giving directions to Victorine as to the hour for serving dinner. It was while she was talking to Victorine as to this matter that Snooky began to whine.

"Stop!"

"And tell Maggie," pursued Travis, "to fricassee her chicken, and not to have it too well done—"

"Sto-o-op!" whined Snooky again.

"And leave the heart out for Papum. He likes the heart—"

"Sto-o-op!"

"Unbiassed by prejudice," murmured Mr. Bessemer, "vigorous and to the point. I'll have another roll."

"Pa, make Howard stop!"

"Howard!" exclaimed Travis; "what is it now?"

"Howard's squirting watermelon-seeds at me," whined Snooky, "and Pa won't make him stop."

"Oh, I didn't so!" vociferated Howard. "I only held one between my fingers, and it just kind of shot out."

"You'll come upstairs with me in just five minutes," announced Travis, "and get ready for Sunday-school."

Howard knew that his older sister's decisions were as the laws of the Persians, and found means to finish his breakfast within the specified time, though not without protest. Once upstairs, however, the usual Sunday morning drama of despatching him to Sunday-school in presentable condition was enacted. At every moment his voice could be heard uplifted in shrill expostulation and debate. No, his hands were clean enough, and he didn't see why he had to wear that little old pink tie; and, oh! his new shoes were too tight and hurt his sore toe; and he wouldn't, he wouldn't—no, not if he were killed for it, change his shirt. Not for a moment did Travis lose her temper with him. But "very well," she declared at length, "the next time she saw that little Miner girl she would tell her that he had said she was his beau-heart. *Now* would he hold still while she brushed his hair?"

At a few minutes before eleven Travis and her father went to church. They were Episcopalians, and for time out of mind had rented a half-pew in the church of their denomination on California Street, not far from Chinatown. By noon the family reassembled at dinner-table, where Mr. Bessemer ate his chicken-heart—after Travis had thrice reminded him of it—and expressed himself as to the sermon and the minister's theology: sometimes to his daughter and sometimes to himself.

After dinner Howard and Snooky foregathered in the nursery with their beloved lead soldiers; Travis went to her room to write letters; and Mr. Bessemer sat in the bay window of the dining-room reading the paper from end to end.

At five Travis bestirred herself. It was Victorine's afternoon out. Travis set the table, spreading a cover of blue denim edged with white braid, which showed off the silver and the set of delft—her great and never-ending joy—to great effect. Then she tied

her apron about her, and went into the kitchen to make the mayonnaise dressing for the potato salad, to slice the ham, and to help the cook (a most inefficient Irish person, taken on only for that month during the absence of the family's beloved and venerated Sing Wo) in the matter of preparing the Sunday evening tea.

Tea was had at half-past five. Never in the history of the family had its *menu* varied: cold ham, potato salad, pork and beans, canned fruit, chocolate, and the inevitable pitcher of ice-water.

In the absence of Victorine, Maggie waited on the table, very uncomfortable in her one good dress and stiff white apron. She stood off from the table, making awkward dabs at it from time to time. In her excess of deference she developed a clumsiness that was beyond all expression. She passed the plates upon the wrong side, and remembered herself with a broken apology at inopportune moments. She dropped a spoon, she spilled the ice-water. She handled the delft cups and platters with an exaggerated solicitude, as though they were glass bombs. She brushed the crumbs into their laps instead of into the crumb-tray, and at last, when she had sat even Travis' placid nerves in a jangle, was dismissed to the kitchen, and retired with a gasp of unspeakable relief.

Suddenly there came a prolonged trilling of the electric bell, and Howard flashed a grin at Travis. Snooky jumped up and pushed back, crying out: "I'll go! I'll go!"

Mr. Bessemer glanced nervously at Travis. "That's Mr. Rivers, isn't it, daughter?" Travis smiled. "Well, I think I'll—I think I'd better—" he began.

"No," said Travis, "I don't want you to, Papum; you sit right where you are. How absurd!"

The old man dropped obediently back into his seat.

"That's all right, Maggie," said Travis as the cook reappeared from the pantry. "Snooky went."

"Huh!" exclaimed Howard, his grin widening. "Huh!"

"And remember one thing, Howard," remarked Travis calmly; "don't you ever again ask Mr. Rivers for a nickel to put in your bank."

Mr. Bessemer roused up. "Did that boy do that?" he inquired sharply of Travis.

"Well, well, he won't do it again," said Travis soothingly. The old man glared for an instant at Howard, who shifted uneasily in his seat. But meanwhile Snooky had clambered down to the outside door, and before anything further could be said young Rivers came into the dining-room.

II

For some reason, never made sufficiently clear, Rivers' parents had handicapped him from the baptismal font with the prenomen of Condé, which, however, upon Anglo-Saxon tongues, had been promptly modified to Condy, or even, among his familiar and intimate friends, to Conny. Asked as to his birthplace—for no Californian assumes that his neighbor is born in the State—Condy was wont to reply that he was "bawn 'n' rais'" in Chicago; "but," he always added, "I couldn't help that, you know." His people had come West in the early eighties, just in time to bury the father in alien soil. Condy was an only child. He was educated at the State University, had a finishing year at Yale, and a few months after his return home was taken on the staff of the San Francisco "Daily Times" as an associate editor of its Sunday supplement. For Condy had developed a taste and talent in the matter of writing. Short stories were his mania. He had begun by an inoculation of the Kipling virus, had suffered an almost fatal attack of Harding Davis, and had even been affected by Maupassant. He "went in" for accuracy of detail; held that if one wrote a story involving firemen one should have, or seem to have, every detail of the department at his fingers' ends, and should "bring in" to the tale all manner of technical names and cant phrases.

Much of his work on the Sunday supplement of "The Times" was of the hack order—special articles, write-ups, and interviews. About once a month, however, he wrote a short story, and of late, now that he was convalescing from Maupassant and had begun to be somewhat himself, these stories had improved in quality, and one or two had even been copied in the Eastern journals. He earned $100 a month.

When Snooky had let him in, Rivers dashed up the stairs of the Bessemers' flat, two at a time, tossed his stick into a porcelain cane-rack in the hall, wrenched off his overcoat with a single movement, and precipitated himself, panting, into the dining-room, tugging at his gloves.

He was twenty-eight years old—nearly ten years older than

Travis; tall and somewhat lean; his face smooth-shaven and pink all over, as if he had just given it a violent rubbing with a crash towel. Unlike most writing folk, he dressed himself according to prevailing custom. But Condy overdid the matter. His scarfs and cravats were too bright, his colored shirt-bosoms were too broadly barred, his waistcoats too extreme. Even Travis, as she rose to his abrupt entrance, told herself that of a Sunday evening a pink shirt and scarlet tie were a combination hardly to be forgiven.

Condy shook her hand in both of his, then rushed over to Mr. Bessemer, exclaiming between breaths: "Don't get up, sir—don't *think* of it! Heavens! I'm disgustingly late. You're all through. My watch—this beastly watch of mine—I can't imagine how I came to be so late. You did quite right not to wait."

Then as his morbidly keen observation caught a certain look of blankness on Travis' face, and his rapid glance noted no vacant chair at table, he gave a quick gasp of dismay.

"Heavens and earth! didn't you *expect* me?" he cried. "I thought you said—I thought—I must have forgotten—I must have got it mixed up somehow. What a hideous mistake, what a blunder! What a fool I am!"

He dropped into a chair against the wall and mopped his forehead with a blue-bordered handkerchief.

"Well, what difference does it make, Condy?" said Travis quietly. "I'll put another place for you."

"No, no!" he vociferated, jumping up. "I won't hear of it, I won't permit it! You'll think I did it on purpose!"

Travis ignored his interference, and made a place for him opposite the children, and had Maggie make some more chocolate.

Condy meanwhile covered himself with opprobrium.

"And all this trouble—I always make trouble everywhere I go. Always a round man in a square hole, or a square man in a round hole."

He got up and sat down again, crossed and recrossed his legs, picked up little ornaments from the mantelpiece, and replaced them without consciousness of what they were, and finally broke the crystal of his watch as he was resetting it by the cuckoo clock.

"Hello!" he exclaimed suddenly; "where did you get that clock? Where did you get that clock? That's new to me. Where did that come from?"

"That cuckoo clock?" inquired Travis, with a stare. "Condy Rivers, you've been here and in this room at least twice a week

for the last year and a half, and that clock, and no other, has always hung there."

But already Condy had forgotten or lost interest in the clock.

"Is that so? is that so?" he murmured absent-mindedly, seating himself at the table.

Mr. Bessemer was murmuring: "That clock's a little fast. I can not make that clock keep time. Victorine has lost the key. I have to wind it with a monkey-wrench. Now I'll try some more beans. Maggie has put in too much pepper. I'll have to have a new key made to-morrow."

"Hey? Yes—yes. Is that so?" answered Condy Rivers, bewildered. wishing to be polite, yet unable to follow the old man's mutterings.

"He's not talking to you," remarked Travis, without lowering her voice. "You know how Papum goes on. He won't hear a word you say. Well, I read your story in this morning's 'Times.'"

A few moments later, while Travers and Condy were still discussing this story, Mr. Bessemer rose. "Well, Mr. Rivers," he announced, "I guess I'll say good-night. Come, Snooky."

"Yes, take her with you, Papum," said Travis. "She'll go to sleep on the lounge here if you don't. Howard, have you got your lessons for to-morrow?"

It appeared that he had not. Snooky whined to stay up a little longer, but at last consented to go with her father. They all bade Condy good-night and took themselves away, Howard lingering a moment in the door in the hope of the nickel he dared not ask for. Maggie reappeared to clear away the table.

"Let's go in the parlor," suggested Travis, rising. "Don't you want to?"

The parlor was the front room overlooking the street, and was reached by the long hall that ran the whole length of the flat, passing by the door of each one of its eight rooms in turn.

Travis preceded Condy, and turned up one of the burners in a colored globe of the little brass chandelier.

The parlor was a small affair, peopled by a family of chairs and sofas robed in white drugget. A gold-and-white effect had been striven for throughout the room. The walls had been tinted instead of papered, and bunches of hand-painted pink flowers tied up with blue ribbons straggled from one corner of the ceiling. Across one angle of the room straddled a brass easel upholding a crayon portrait of Travis at the age of nine, "enlarged from a

photograph." A yellow drape ornamented one corner of the frame, while another drape of blue depended from one end of the mantelpiece.

The piano, upon which nobody ever played, balanced the easel in an opposite corner. Over the mantelpiece hung in a gilded frame a steel engraving of Priscilla and John Alden; and on the mantel itself two bisque figures of an Italian fisher boy and girl kept company with the clock, a huge timepiece, set in a red plush palette, that never was known to go. But at the right of the fireplace, and balancing the tuft of pampa-grass to the left, was an inverted section of a sewer-pipe painted blue and decorated with daisies. Into it was thrust a sheaf of cat-tails, gilded, and tied with a pink ribbon.

Travis dropped upon the shrouded sofa, and Condy set himself carefully down on one of the frail chairs with its spindling golden legs, and they began to talk.

Condy had taken her to the theatre the Monday night of that week, as had been his custom ever since he had known her well, and there was something left for them to say on that subject. But in ten minutes they had exhausted it. An engagement of a girl known to both of them had just been announced. Condy brought that up, and kept conversation going for another twenty minutes, and then filled in what threatened to be a gap by telling her stories of the society reporters, and how they got inside news by listening to telephone party wires for days at a time. Travis' condemnation of this occupied another five or ten minutes; and so what with this and with that they reached nine o'clock. Then decidedly the evening began to drag. It was too early to go. Condy could find no good excuse for takng himself away, and, though Travis was good-natured enough, and met him more than half-way, their talk lapsed, and lapsed, and lapsed. The breaks became more numerous and lasted longer. Condy began to wonder if he was boring her. No sooner had the suspicion entered his head than it hardened into a certainty, and at once what little fluency and freshness he yet retained forsook him on the spot. What made matters worse was his recollection of other evenings that of late he had failed in precisely the same manner. Even while he struggled to save the situation Condy was wondering if they two were talked out—if they had lost charm for each other. Did he not know Travis through and through by now—her opinions, her ideas, her convictions? Was there any more freshness in her for him? Was their little flirtation of the last eighteen months, charming as it had been, about to end?

Had they played out the play, had they come to the end of each other's resources? He had never considered the possibility of this before; but all at once as he looked at Travis—looked fairly into her little brown-black eyes—it was borne in upon him that she was thinking precisely the same thing.

Condy Rivers had met Travis at a dance a year and a half before this, and, because she was so very pretty, so unaffected, and so good-natured, had found means to see her three or four times a week ever since. They two "went out" not a little in San Francisco society, and had been in a measure identified with what was known as the Younger Set; though Travis was too young to come out, and Rivers too old to feel very much at home with girls of twenty and boys of eighteen.

They had known each other in the conventional way (as conventionality goes in San Francisco); during the season Rivers took her to the theatres Monday nights, and called regularly Wednesdays and Sundays. Then they met at dances, and managed to be invited to the same houses for teas and dinners. They had flirted rather desperately, and at times Condy even told himself that he loved this girl so much younger than he—this girl with the smiling eyes and robust figure and yellow hair, who was so frank, so straightforward, and so wonderfully pretty.

But evidently they had come to the last move in the game, and as Condy reflected that after all he had never known the real Travis, that the girl whom he told himself he knew through and through was only the Travis of dinner parties and afternoon functions, he was suddenly surprised to experience a sudden qualm of deep and genuine regret. He had never been *near* to her, after all. They were as far apart as when they had first met. And yet he knew enough of her to know that she was "worth while." He had had experience—all the experience he wanted—with other older women and girls of society. They were sophisticated, they were all a little tired, they had run the gamut of amusements—in a word, they were jaded. But Travis, this girl of nineteen, who was not yet even a *débutante,* had been fresh and unspoiled, had been new and strong and young.

"Of course, you may call it what you like. He was nothing more nor less than intoxicated—yes, drunk."

"Hah! who—what—wh—what are you talking about?" gasped Condy sitting bolt upright.

"Jack Carter," answered Travis. "No," she added, shaking her

head at him helplessly, "he hasn't been listening to a word. I'm talking about Jack Carter and the 'Saturday Evening' last night."

"No, no, I haven't heard. Forgive me; I was thinking—thinking of something else. Who was drunk?"

Travis paused a moment, settling her side-combs in her hair; then:

"If you will try to listen, I'll tell it all over again, because it's serious with me, and I'm going to take a very decided stand about it. You know," she went on—"you know what the 'Saturday Evening' is. Plenty of the girls who are not 'out' belong, and a good many of last year's *débutantes* come, as well as the older girls of three or four seasons' standing. You could call it representative, couldn't you? Well, they always serve punch; and you know yourself that you have seen men there who have taken more than they should."

"Yes, yes," admitted Condy. "I know Carter and the two Catlin boys always do."

"It gets pretty bad sometimes, doesn't it?" she said.

"It does, it does—and it's shameful. But most of the girls—*most* of them—don't seem to mind."

Miss Bessemer stiffened a bit. "There are one or two girls that do," she said quietly. "Frank Catlin had the decency to go home last night," she continued; "and his brother wasn't any worse than usual. But Jack Carter must have been drinking before he came. He was very bad indeed—as bad," she said between her teeth, "as he could be and yet walk straight. As you say, most of the girls don't mind. They say, 'It's only Johnnie Carter; what do you expect?' But one of the girls—you know her, Laurie Flagg—cut a dance with him last night and told him exactly why. Of course, Carter was furious. He was sober enough to think he had been insulted; and what do you suppose he did?"

"What? what?" exclaimed Condy, breathless, leaning toward her.

"Went about the halls and dressing-rooms circulating some dirty little lie about Laurie. Actually trying to—to"—Travis hesitated—"to make a scandal about her."

Condy bounded in his seat. "Beast, cad, swine!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't think," said Travis, "that Carter would so much as dare to ask me to dance with him—"

"Did he? did—did—"

"Wait," she interrupted. "So I wasn't at all prepared for what happened. During the german, before I knew it, there he was in

front of me. It was a break, and he wanted it. I hadn't time to think. The only idea I had was that if I refused him he might tell some dirty little lie about me. I was all confused—mixed up. I felt just as though it were a snake that I had to humor to get rid of. I gave him the break."

Condy sat speechless. Suddenly he arose.

"Well, now, let's see," he began, speaking rapidly, his hands twisting and untwisting till the knuckles cracked. "Now, let's see. You leave it to me. I know Carter. He's going to be at a stag dinner where I am invited to-morrow night, and I—I—"

"No, you won't, Condy," said Travis placidly. "You'll pay no attention to it, and I'll tell you why. Suppose you should make a scene with Mr. Carter—I don't know how men settle these things. Well, it would be told in all the clubs and in all the newspaper offices that two men had quarreled over a girl; and my name is mentioned, discussed, and handed around from one crowd of men to another, from one club to another; and then, of course, the papers take it up. By that time Mr. Carter will have told his side of the story and invented another dirty little lie, and I'm the one who suffers the most in the end. And remember, Condy, that I haven't any mother in such an affair, not even an older sister. No, we'll just let the matter drop. It would be more dignified, anyhow. Only I have made up my mind what I am going to do."

"What's that?"

"I'm not coming out. If that's the sort of thing one has to put up with in society"—Travis drew a little line on the sofa at her side with her finger-tip—"I am going to—stop—right—there. It's not"—Miss Bessemer stiffened again—"that I'm afraid of Jack Carter and his dirty stories; I simply don't want to know the kind of people who have made Jack Carter possible. The other girls don't mind it, nor many men besides you, Condy; and I'm not going to be associated with people who take it as a joke for a man to come to a function drunk. And as for having a good time, I'll find my amusements somewhere else. I'll ride a wheel, take long walks, study something. But as for leading the life of a society girl—no! And whether I have a good time or not, I'll keep my own self-respect. At least I'll never have to dance with a drunken man. I won't have to humiliate myself like that a second time."

"But I presume you will still continue to go out somewhere," protested Condy Rivers.

She shook her head.

"I have thought it all over, and I've talked about it with Papum. There's no half way about it. The only way to stop is to stop short. Just this afternoon I've regretted three functions for next week, and I shall resign from the 'Saturday Evening.' Oh, it's not the Jack Carter affair alone!" she exclaimed; "the whole thing tires me. Mind, Condy," she exclaimed, "I'm not going to break with it because I have any 'purpose in life,' or that sort of thing. I want to have a good time, and I'm going to see if I can't have it in my own way. If the kind of thing that makes Jack Carter possible is conventionality, then I'm done with conventionality for good. I am going to try, from this time on, to be just as true to myself as I can be. I am going to be sincere, and not pretend to like people and things that I don't like; and I'm going to do the things that I like to do—just so long as they are the things a good girl can do. See, Condy?"

"You're fine," murmured Condy breathless. "You're fine as gold, Travis, and I—I love you all the better for it."

"Ah, *now!*" exclaimed Travis, with a brusque movement, "there's another thing we must talk about. No more foolishness between us. We've had a jolly little flirtation, I know, and it's been good fun while it lasted. I know you like me, and you know that I like you; but as for loving each other, you know we don't. Yes, you say that you love me and that I'm the only girl. That's part of the game. I can play it"—her little eyes began to dance—"quite as well as you. But it's playing with something that's quite too serious to be played with—after all, isn't it, now? It's insincere, and, as I tell you, from now on I'm going to be as true and as sincere and as honest as I can."

"But I tell you that I *do* love you," protested Condy, trying to make the words ring true.

Travis looked about the room an instant as if in deliberation; then abruptly: "Ah! what am I going to *do* with such a boy as you are, after all—a great big, overgrown boy? Condy Rivers, look at me straight in the eye. Tell me, do you honestly love me? You know what I mean when I say 'love.' Do you love me?"

"No, I don't!" he exclaimed blankly, as though he had just discovered the fact.

"There!" declared Travis—"and I don't love you." They both began to laugh.

"Now," added Travis, "we don't need to have the burden and

trouble of keeping up the pretences any more. We understand each other, don't we?"

"This is queer enough," said Condy drolly.

"But isn't it an improvement?"

Condy scoured his head.

"Tell me the truth," she insisted; "*you* be sincere."

"I do believe it is. Why—why—Travis by Jingo! Travis, I think I'm going to like you better than ever now."

"Never mind. Is it an agreement?"

"What is?"

"That we don't pretend to love each other any more?"

"All right—yes—you're right; because the moment I began to love you I should like you so much less."

She put out her hand. "That's an agreement, then."

Condy took her hand in his. "Yes, it's an agreement." But when, as had been his custom, he made as though to kiss her hand, Travis drew it quickly away.

"No! no!" she said firmly, smiling for all that—"no more foolishness."

"But—but," he protested, "it's not so radical as that, is it? You're not going to overturn such time-worn, time-honored customs as that? Why, this is a regular rebellion."

"No, sire," quoted Travis, trying not to laugh, "it is a revolution."

III

Although Monday was practically a holiday for the Sunday-supplement staff of "The Times," Condy Rivers made a point to get down to the office betimes the next morning. There were reasons why a certain article descriptive of a great whaleback steamer taking on grain for famine-stricken India should be written that day, and Rivers wanted his afternoon free in order to go to Laurie Flagg's coming-out tea.

But as he came into his room at "The Times" office, which he shared with the exchange and sporting editors, and settled himself at his desk, he suddenly remembered that, under the new order of things, he need not expect to see Travis at the Flaggs'.

"Well," he muttered, "maybe it doesn't make so much difference, after all. She was a corking fine girl, but—might as well admit

it—the play is played out. Of course, I don't love her—any more than she loves me. I'll see less and less of her now. It's inevitable, and after a while we'll hardly even meet. In a way, it's a pity; but, of course, one has to be sensible about these things. . . . Well, this whaleback now."

He rang up the Chamber of Commerce, and found out that the "City of Everett," which was the whaleback's name, was at the Mission Street wharf. This made it possible for him to write the article in two ways. He either could fake his copy from a clipping on the subject which the exchange editor had laid on his desk, or he could go down in person to the wharf, interview the captain, and inspect the craft for himself. The former was the short and easy method. The latter was more troublesome, but would result in a far more interesting article.

Condy debated the subject a few minutes, then decided to go down to the wharf. San Francisco's water-front was always interesting, and he might get hold of a photograph of the whaleback. All at once the "idea" of the article struck him, the certain underlying notion that would give importance and weight to the mere details and descriptions. Condy's enthusiasm flared up in an instant.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed; "by Jove!"

He clapped on his hat wrong side foremost, crammed a sheaf of copy-paper into his pocket, and was on the street again in another moment. Then it occurred to him that he had forgotten to call at his club that morning for his mail, as was his custom, on the way to the office. He looked at his watch. It was early yet, and his club was but two blocks' distance. He decided that he would get his letters at the club, and read them on the way down to the wharf.

For Condy had joined a certain San Francisco club of artists, journalists, musicians, and professional men that is one of the institutions of the city, and, in fact, famous throughout the United States. He was one of the younger members, but was popular and well liked, and on more than one occasion had materially contributed to the fun of the club's "low jinks."

In his box this morning he found one letter that he told himself he must read upon the instant. It bore upon the envelope the name of a New York publishing house to whom Condy had sent a collection of his short stories about a month before. He took the letter into the "round window" of the club, overlooking the street, and tore it open excitedly. The fact that he had received a letter

from the firm without the return of his manuscript seemed a good omen. This was what he read:

Conde Rivers, Esq., Bohemian Club, San Francisco, Cal.

DEAR SIR: We return to you by this mail the manuscript of your stories, which we do not consider as available for publication at the present moment. We would say, however, that we find in several of them indications of a quite unusual order of merit. The best-selling book just now is the short novel—say thirty thousand words—of action and adventure. Judging from the stories of your collection, we suspect that your talent lies in this direction, and we would suggest that you write such a novel and submit the same to us. Very respectfully,

THE CENTENNIAL CO.,
New York.

Condy shoved the letter into his pocket and collapsed limply into his chair.

"What's the good of trying to do anything anyhow!" he muttered, looking gloomily down into the street. "My level is just the hack-work of a local Sunday supplement, and I am a fool to think of anything else."

His enthusiasm in the matter of the "City of Everett" was cold and dead in a moment. He could see no possibilities in the subject whatever. His "idea" of a few minutes previous seemed ridiculous and overwrought. He would go back to the office and grind out his copy from the exchange editor's clipping.

Just then his eye was caught by a familiar figure in trim, well-fitting black halted on the opposite corner waiting for the passage of a cable car. It was Travis Bessemer. No one but she could carry off such rigorous simplicity in the matter of dress so well: black skirt, black Russian blouse, tiny black bonnet and black veil, white kids with black stitching. Simplicity itself. Yet the style of her, as Condy Rivers told himself, flew up and hit you in the face; and her figure—was there anything more perfect? and the soft pretty effect of her yellow hair seen through the veil—could anything be more fetching? and her smart carriage and the fling of her fine broad shoulders, and—no, it was no use; Condy had to run down to speak to her.

"Come, come!" she said as he pretended to jostle against her on the curbstone without noticing her; "*you* had best go to work. Loafing at ten o'clock on the street corners—the idea!"

"It *is* not—it can not be—and yet it is—it is *she*," he burlesqued;

"and after all these years!" Then in his natural voice: "Hello, T. B."

"Hello, C. R."

"Where are you going?"

"Home. I've just run down for half an hour to have the head of my banjo tightened."

"If I put you on the car, will you expect me to pay your car-fare?"

"Condy Rivers, I've long since got over the idea of ever expecting you to have any change concealed about your person."

"Huh! no, it all goes for theatre tickets, and flowers, and boxes of candy for a certain girl I know. But"—and he glared at her significantly—"no more foolishness."

She laughed. "What are you 'on' this morning, Condy?"

Condy told her as they started to walk toward Kearney Street.

"But why *don't* you go to the dock and see the vessel, if you can make a better article that way?"

"Oh, what's the good! The Centennial people have turned down my stories."

She commiserated him for this; then suddenly exclaimed:

"No, you must go down to the dock! You ought to, Condy. Oh, I tell you, let me go down with you!"

In an instant Condy leaped to the notion. "Splendid! splendid! no reason why you shouldn't!" he exclaimed. And within fifteen minutes the two were treading the wharves and quays of the city's water-front.

Ships innumerable nuzzled at the endless line of docks, mast overspiring mast, and bowsprit overlapping bowsprit, till the eye was bewildered, as if by the confusion of branches in a leafless forest. In the distance the mass of rigging resolved itself into a solid gray blur against the sky. The great hulks, green and black and slate gray, laid themselves along the docks, straining leisurely at their mammoth chains, their flanks opened, their cargoes, as it were their entrails, spewed out in a wild disarray of crate and bale and box. Sailors and stevedores swarmed them like vermin. Trucks rolled along the wharves like peals of ordnance, the horse-hoofs beating the boards like heavy drum-taps. Chains clanked, a ship's dog barked incessantly from a companionway, ropes creaked in complaining pulleys, blocks rattled, hoisting-engines coughed and strangled, while all the air was redolent of oakum, of pitch, of paint, of spices, of ripe fruit, of clean cool lumber, of coffee, of tar, of bilge, and the brisk, nimble odor of the sea.

Travis was delighted, her little brown eyes snapping, her cheeks flushing, as she drank in the scene.

"To think," she cried, "where all these ships have come from! Look at their names; aren't they perfect? Just the names, see: the 'Mary Baker,' Hull; and the 'Anandale,' Liverpool; and the 'Two Sisters,' Calcutta; and see that one they're calking, the 'Montevideo,' Callao; and there, look! look! the very one you're looking for, the 'City of Everett,' San Francisco."

The whaleback, an immense tube of steel plates, lay at her wharf, sucking in entire harvests of wheat from the San Joaquin valley—harvests that were to feed strangely clad skeletons on the southern slopes of the Himalaya foot-hills. Travis and Condy edged their way among piles of wheat-bags, dodging drays and rumbling trucks, and finally brought up at the after gangplank, where a sailor halted them. Condy exhibited his reporter's badge.

"I represent 'The Times,'" he said, with profound solemnity, "and I want to see the officer in charge."

The sailor fell back upon the instant.

"Power of the press," whispered Condy to Travis as the two gained the deck.

A second sailor directed them to the mate, whom they found in the chart-room, engaged, singularly enough, in trimming the leaves of a scraggly geranium.

Condy explained his mission with flattering allusions to the whaleback and the novelty of the construction. The mate—an old man with a patriarchal beard—softened at once, asked them into his own cabin aft, and even brought out a camp-stool for Travis, brushing it with his sleeve before setting it down.

While Condy was interviewing the old fellow, Travis was examining, with the interest of a child, the details of the cabin: the rack-like bunk, the washstand, ingeniously constructed so as to shut into the bulkhead when not in use, the alarm-clock screwed to the wall, and the array of photographs thrust into the mirror between frame and glass. One, an old daguerreotype, particularly caught her fancy. It was the portrait of a very beautiful girl, wearing the old-fashioned side curls and high comb of a half-century previous. The old mate noticed the attention she paid to it, and, as soon as he had done giving information to Condy, turned and nodded to Travis, and said quietly: "She was pretty, wasn't she?"

"Oh, very!" answered Travis, without looking away.

There was a silence. Then the mate, his eyes wide and thoughtful, said with a long breath:

"And she was just about your age, miss, when I saw her; and you favor her, too."

Condy and Travis held their breaths in attention. There in the cabin of that curious nondescript whaleback they had come suddenly to the edge of a romance—a romance that had been lived through before they were born. Then Travis said in a low voice, and sweetly: "She died?"

"Before I ever set eyes on her, miss. That is, *maybe* she died. I sometimes think—fact is, I really believe she's alive yet, and waiting for me." He hesitated awkwardly. "I dunno," he said, pulling his beard. "I don't usually tell that story to strange folk; but you remind me so of her that I guess I will."

Condy sat down on the edge of the bunk, and the mate seated himself on the plush settle opposite the door, his elbows on his knees, his eyes fixed on a patch of bright sunlight upon the deck outside.

"I began life," he said, "as a deep-sea diver—began pretty young, too. I first put on the armor when I was twenty, nothing but a lad; but I could take the pressure up to seventy pounds even then. One of my very first dives was off Trincomalee, on the coast of Ceylon. A mail packet had gone down in a squall with all on board. Six of the bodies had come up and had been recovered, but the seventh hadn't. It was the body of the daughter of the governor of the island, a beautiful young girl of nineteen, whom everybody loved. I was sent for to go down and bring the body up. Well, I went down. The packet lay in a hundred feet of water, and that's a wonder deep dive. I had to go down twice. The first time I couldn't find anything, though I went all through the berth-deck. I came up to the wrecking-float and reported that I had seen nothing. There were a lot of men there belonging to the wrecking gang, and some correspondents of London papers. But they would have it that she was below, and had me go down again. I did, and this time I found her."

The mate paused a moment.

"I'll have to tell you," he went on, "that when a body don't come to the surface it will stand or sit in a perfectly natural position until a current or movement of the water around touches it. When that happens—well, you'd say the body was alive; and old divers have a superstition—no, it *ain't* just a superstition, I believe it's so

—that drowned people really don't die till they come to the surface, and the air touches them. We say that the drowned who don't come up still have some sort of life of their own way down there in all that green water . . . some kind of life . . . surely . . . surely. When I went down the second time, I came across the door of what I thought at first was the linen-closet. But it turned out to be a little stateroom. I opened it. There was the girl. She was sitting on the sofa opposite the door, with a little hat on her head, and holding a satchel in her lap, just as if she was ready to go ashore. Her eyes were wide open, and she was looking right at me and smiling. It didn't seem terrible or ghastly in the least. She seemed very sweet. When I opened the door it set the water in motion, and she got up and dropped the satchel, and came toward me smiling and holding out her arms.

"I stepped back quick and shut the door, and sat down in one of the saloon chairs to fetch my breath, for it had given me a start. The next thing to do was to send her up. But I began to think. She seemed so pretty as she was. What was the use of bringing her up—up there on the wrecking float with that crowd of men—up where the air would get at her, and where they would put her in the ground along o' the worms? If I left her there she'd always be sweet and pretty—always be nineteen; and I remembered what old divers said about drowned people living just so long as they stayed below. You see, I was only a lad then, and things like that impress you when you're young. Well, I signaled to be hauled up. They asked me on the float if I'd seen anything, and I said no. That was all there was to the affair. They never raised the ship, and in a little while it was all forgotten.

"But I never forgot it, and I always remembered her, way down there in all that still green water, waiting there in that little stateroom for me to come back and open the door. And I've growed to be an old man remembering her; but she's always stayed just as she was the first day I saw her, when she came toward me smiling and holding out her arms. She's always stayed young and fresh and pretty. I never saw her but that once. Only afterward I got her picture from a native woman of Trincomalee who was housekeeper at the Residency where the governor of the island lived. Somehow I never could care for other women after that, and I ain't never married for that reason."

"No, no, of course not!" exclaimed Travis, in a low voice, as the old fellow paused.

"Fine, fine; oh, fine as gold!" murmured Condy, under his breath.

"Well," said the mate, getting up and rubbing his knee, "that's the story. Now you know all about that picture. Will you have a glass of Madeira, miss?"

He got out a bottle of wine bearing the genuine Funchal label and filled three tiny glasses. Travis pushed up her veil, and she and Condy rose.

"This is to *her*," said Travis gravely.

"Thank you, miss," answered the mate, and the three drank in silence.

As Travis and Condy were going down the gangplank they met the captain of the whaleback coming up.

"I saw you in there talking to old McPherson," he explained. "Did you get what you wanted from him?"

"More, more!" exclaimed Condy.

"My hand in the fire, he told you that yarn about the girl who was drowned off Trincomalee. Of course, I knew it. The old boy's wits are turned on that subject. He *will* have it that the body hasn't decomposed in all this time. Good seaman enough, and a first-class navigator, but he's soft in that one spot."

IV

"Oh, but the *story* of it!" exclaimed Condy as he and Travis regained the wharf—"the story of it! Isn't it a ripper. Isn't it a corker! His leaving her that way, and never caring for any other girl afterward."

"And so original," she commented, quite as enthusiastic as he.

"Original?—why, it's new as paint! It's—it's—Travis, I'll make a story out of this that will be copied in every paper between the two oceans."

They were so interested in the mate's story that they forgot to take a car, and walked up Clay Street talking it over, suggesting, rearranging, and embellishing; and Condy was astonished and delighted to note that she "caught on" to the idea as quickly as he, and knew the telling points and what details to leave out.

"And I'll make a bang-up article out of the whaleback herself," declared Condy. The "idea" of the article had returned to him, and all his enthusiasm with it.

"And look here," he said, showing her the letter from the Centennial Company. "They turned down my book, but see what they say."

"Quite an unusual order of merit!" cried Travis. "Why, that's fine! Why didn't you show this to me before?—and asking you like this to write them a novel of adventure! What *more* can you want? Oh!" she exclaimed impatiently, "that's so like you; you would tell everybody about your reverses, and carry on about them yourself, but never say a word when you get a little boom. Have you an idea for a thirty-thousand-word novel? Wouldn't that diver's story do?"

"No, there's not enough in that for thirty thousand words. I haven't any idea at all—never wrote a story of adventure—never wrote anything longer than six thousand words. But I'll keep my eye open for something that will do. By the way—by Jove! Travis, where are we?"

They looked briskly around them, and the bustling, breezy water-front faded from their recollections. They were in a world of narrow streets, of galleries and overhanging balconies. Craziest structures, riddled and honeycombed with stairways and passages, shut out the sky, though here and there rose a building of extraordinary richness and most elaborate ornamentation. Color was everywhere. A thousand little notes of green and yellow, of vermilion and sky blue, assaulted the eye. Here it was a doorway, here a vivid glint of cloth or hanging, here a huge scarlet sign lettered with gold, and here a kaleidoscopic effect in the garments of a passer-by. Directly opposite, and two stories above their heads, a sort of huge "loggia," one blaze of gilding and crude vermilions, opened in the gray cement of a crumbling façade, like a sudden burst of flame. Gigantic pot-bellied lanterns of red and gold swung from its ceiling, while along its railing stood a row of pots—brass, ruddy bronze, and blue porcelain—from which were growing red, saffron, purple, pink, and golden tulips without number. The air was vibrant with unfamiliar noises. From one of the balconies near at hand, though unseen, a gong, a pipe, and some kind of stringed instrument wailed and thundered in unison. There was a vast shuffling of padded soles and a continuous interchange of singsong monosyllables, high-pitched and staccato, while from every hand rose the strange aromas of the East—sandalwood, punk, incense, oil, and the smell of mysterious cookery.

"Chinatown!" exclaimed Travis. "I hadn't the faintest idea we

had come up so far. Condy Rivers, do you know what time it is?" She pointed a white kid finger through the doorway of a drug-store, where, amid lacquer boxes and bronze urns of herbs and dried seeds, a round Seth Thomas marked half-past two.

"And your lunch?" cried Condy. "Great heavens! I never thought."

"It's too late to get any at home. Never mind; I'll go somewhere and have a cup of tea."

"Why not get a package of Chinese tea, now that you're down here, and take it home with you?"

"Or drink it here."

"Where?"

"In one of the restaurants. There wouldn't be a soul there at this hour. I know they serve tea any time. Condy, let's try it. Wouldn't it be fun?"

Condy smote his thigh. "Fun!" he vociferated: "fun! It is—by Jove—it would be *heavenly!* Wait a moment. I'll tell you what we will do. Tea won't be enough. We'll go down to Kearney Street, or to the market, and get some crackers to go with it."

They hurried back to the California market, a few blocks distant, and bought some crackers and a wedge of new cheese. On the way back to Chinatown Travis stopped at a music store on Kearney Street to get her banjo, which she had left to have its head tightened; and thus burdened they regained the "town," Condy grieving audibly at having to carry "brown-paper bundles through the street."

"First catch your restaurant," said Travis as they turned into Dupont Street with its thronging coolies and swarming, gayly clad children. But they had not far to seek.

"Here you are!" suddenly exclaimed Condy, halting in front of a wholesale tea-house bearing a sign in Chinese and English. "Come on, Travis!"

They ascended two flights of a broad, brass-bound staircase leading up from the ground floor, and gained the restaurant on the top story of the building. As Travis had foretold, it was deserted. She clasped her gloved hands gayly, crying: "Isn't it delightful! We've the whole place to ourselves."

The restaurant ran the whole depth of the building, and was finished off at either extremity with a gilded balcony, one overlooking Dupont Street and the other the old Plaza. Enormous screens of gilded ebony, intricately carved and set with colored glass panes,

divided the room into three, and one of these divisions, in the rear part, from which they could step out upon the balcony that commanded the view of the Plaza, they elected as their own.

It was charming. At their backs they had the huge, fantastic screen, brave and fine with its coat of gold. In front, through the glass-paned valves of a pair of folding doors, they could see the roofs of the houses beyond the Plaza, and beyond these the blue of the bay with its anchored ships, and even beyond this the faint purple of the Oakland shore. On either side of these doors, in deep alcoves, were divans with mattings and head-rests for opium smokers. The walls were painted blue and hung with vertical Cantonese legends in red and silver, while all around the sides of the room small ebony tables alternated with ebony stools, each inlaid with a slab of mottled marble. A chandelier, all a-glitter with tinsel, swung from the centre of the ceiling over a huge round table of mahogany.

And not a soul was there to disturb them. Below them, out there around the old Plaza, the city drummed through its work with a lazy, soothing rumble. Nearer at hand, Chinatown sent up the vague murmur of the life of the Orient. In the direction of the Mexican quarter, the bell of the cathedral knolled at intervals. The sky was without a cloud and the afternoon was warm.

Condy was inarticulate with the joy of what he called their "discovery." He got up and sat down. He went out into the other room and came back again. He dragged up a couple of the marble-seated stools to the table. He took off his hat, lighted a cigarette, let it go out, lighted it again, and burned his fingers. He opened and closed the folding-doors, pushed the table into a better light, and finally brought Travis out upon the balcony to show her the "points of historical interest" in and around the Plaza.

"There's the Stevenson memorial ship in the centre, see; and right there, where the flagstaff is, General Baker made the funeral oration over the body of Terry. Broderick killed him in a duel—or was it Terry killed Broderick? I forget which. Anyhow, right opposite, where that pawnshop is, is where the Overland stages used to start in '49. And every other building that fronts on the Plaza, even this one we're in now, used to be a gambling-house in bonanza times; and, see, over yonder is the Morgue and the City Prison."

They turned back into the room, and a great, fat Chinaman brought them tea on Condy's order. But besides tea, he brought

dried almonds, pickled watermelon rinds, candied quince, and "China nuts."

Travis cut the cheese into cubes with Condy's penknife, and arranged the cubes in geometric figures upon the crackers.

"But, Condy," she complained, "why in the world did you get so many crackers? There's hundreds of them here—enough to feed a regiment. Why didn't you ask me?"

"Huh! what? what? I don't know. What's the matter with the crackers? You were dickering with the cheese, and the man said, 'How many crackers?' I didn't know. I said, 'Oh, give me a quarter's worth!'"

"And we couldn't possibly have eaten ten cents' worth! Oh, Condy, you are—you are— But never mind, here's your tea. I wonder if this green, pasty stuff is good."

They found that it was, but so sweet that it made their tea taste bitter. The watermelon rinds were flat to their Western palates, but the dried almonds were a great success. Then Condy promptly got the hiccoughs from drinking his tea too fast, and fretted up and down the room like a chicken with the pip till Travis grew faint and weak with laughter.

"Oh, well," he exclaimed aggrievedly—"laugh, that's right! *I* don't laugh. It isn't such fun when you've got 'em yoursel'—*hulp.*"

"But sit down, for goodness' sake! You make me so nervous. You can't walk them off. Sit down and hold your breath while you count nine. Condy, I'm going to take off my gloves and veil. What do you think?"

"Sure, of course; and I'll have a cigarette. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Well, what's that in your hand now?"

"By Jove, I have been smoking! I—I beg your pardon. I'm a regular stable boy. I'll throw it away."

Travis caught his wrist. "What nonsense! I would have told you before if I'd minded."

"But it's gone out!" he exclaimed. "I'll have another."

As he reached into his pocket for his case, his hand encountered a paper-covered volume, and he drew it out in some perplexity.

"Now, how in the wide world did that book come in my pocket?" he muttered, frowning. "What have I been carrying it around for? I've forgotten. I declare I have."

"What book is it?"

"Hey? book? . . . h'm," he murmured, staring.

Travis pounded on the table. "Wake up, Condy, I'm talking to you," she called.

"It's 'Life's Handicap,'" he answered, with a start; "but why and but why have I—"

"What's it about? I never heard of it," she declared.

"You never heard of 'Life's Handicap'?" he shouted; "you never heard—you never—you mean to say you never heard—but here, this won't do. Sit right still, and I'll read you one of these yarns before you're another minute older. Any one of them—open the book at random. Here we are—'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes'; and it's a stem-winder, too."

And then for the first time in her life, there in that airy, golden Chinese restaurant, in the city from which he hasted to flee, Travis Bessemer fell under the charm of the little spectacled colonial, to whose song we all must listen and to whose pipe we all must dance.

There was one "point" in the story of Jukes' strange ride that Condy prided himself upon having discovered. So far as he knew, all critics had overlooked it. It is where Jukes is describing the man-trap of the City of the Dead who are alive, and mentions that the slope of the inclosing sandhills was "about forty-five degrees." Jukes was a civil engineer, and Condy held that it was a capital bit of realism on the part of the author to have him speak of the pitch of the hills in just such technical terms. At first he thought he would call Travis' attention to this bit of cleverness; but as he read he abruptly changed his mind. He would see if she would find it out for herself. It would be a test of her quickness, he told himself; almost an unfair test, because the point was extremely subtle and could easily be ignored by the most experienced of fiction readers. He read steadily on, working himself into a positive excitement as he approached the passage. He came to it and read it through without any emphasis, almost slurring over it in his eagerness to be perfectly fair. But as he began to read the next paragraph, Travis, her little eyes sparkling with interest and attention, exclaimed:

"Just as an engineer would describe it. Isn't that good!"

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Condy, slamming down the book joyfully. "Travis, you are one in a thousand!"

"What—what is it?' she inquired blankly.

"Never mind, never mind; you're a wonder, that's all"—and he

finished the tale without further explanation. Then, while he smoked another cigarette and she drank another cup of tea, he read to her "The Return of Imri" and the "Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney." He found her an easy and enrapt convert to the little Englishman's creed, and for himself tasted the intense delight of revealing to another an appreciation of a literature hitherto ignored.

"Isn't he strong!" cried Travis. "Just a *little* better than Marie Corelli and the Duchess!"

"And to think of having all those stories to read! You haven't read any of them yet?"

"Not a one. I've been reading only the novels we take up in the Wednesday class."

"Lord!" muttered Condy.

Condy's spirits had been steadily rising since the incident aboard the whaleback. The exhilaration of the water-front, his delight over the story he was to make out of the old mate's yarn, Chinatown, the charming unconventionality of their lunch in the Chinese restaurant, the sparkling serenity of the afternoon, and the joy of discovering Travis' appreciation of his adored and venerated author, had put him into a mood bordering close upon hilarity.

"The next event upon our interesting programme," he announced, "will be a banjosephine obligato in A-sia minor, by that justly renowned impresario, Signor Conde Tin-pani Rivers, specially engaged for this performance; with a pleasing and pan-hellenic song-and-dance turn by Miss Travis Bessemer, the infant phenomenon, otherwise known as 'Babby Bessie.'"

"You're not going to play that banjo here?" said Travis, as he stripped away the canvas covering.

"Order in the gallery!" cried Condy, beginning to tune up. Then in a rapid, professional monotone: "Ladies-and-gentlemen-with - your - kind - permission - I - will - endeavor - to - give - you - an - imitation - of - a - Carolina - coon - song" — and without more ado, singing the words to a rattling, catchy accompaniment, swung off into—

"F—or *my* gal's a high-born leddy,
She's brack, but not too shady."

He did not sing loud, and the clack and snarl of the banjo carried hardly further than the adjoining room; but there was no one to hear, and, as he went along, even Travis began to hum the words,

But at that, Condy stopped abruptly, laid the instrument across his knees with exaggerated solicitude, and said deliberately:

"Travis, you are a good, sweet girl, and what you lack in beauty you make up in amiability, and I've no doubt you are kind to your aged father; but you—can—not—sing."

Travis was cross in a moment, all the more so because Condy had spoken the exact truth. It was quite impossible for her to carry a tune half a dozen bars without entangling herself in as many different keys. What voice she had was not absolutely bad; but as she persisted in singing in spite of Condy's guying, he put back his head and began a mournful and lugubrious howling.

"Ho!" she exclaimed, grabbing the banjo from his knees, "if I can't sing, I can play better than some smart people."

"Yes, by note," rallied Condy, as Travis executed a banjo "piece" of no little intricacy. "That's just like a machine—like a hand-piano."

"Order in the gallery!" she retorted, without pausing in her playing. She finished with a great flourish and gazed at him in triumph, only to find him pretending a profound slumber. "O—o—o!" she remarked between her teeth, "I just hate you, Condy Rivers."

"There are others," he returned airily.

"Talk about slang."

"*Now* what will we do?" he cried. "Let's *do* something. Suppose we break something—just for fun."

Then suddenly the gayety went out of his face, and he started up and clapped his hand to his head with a gasp of dismay. "Great Heavens!" he exclaimed.

"Condy," cried Travis in alarm, "what is it?"

"The Tea!" he vociferated. "Laurie Flagg's Tea. I ought to be there—right this minute."

Travis fetched a sigh of relief. "Is that all?"

"All!" he retorted. "All! Why, it's past four now—and I'd forgotten every last thing." Then suddenlly falling calm again, and quietly resuming his seat: "I don't see as it makes any difference. I won't go, that's all. Push those almonds here, will you, Miss Lady? —But we aren't *doing* anything," he exclaimed, with a brusque return of exuberance. "Let's do things. What'll we do? Think of something. Is there anything we can break?" Then, without any transition, he vaulted upon the table and began to declaim, with tremendous gestures:

"There once was a beast called an Ounce,
Who went with a spring and a bounce.
His head was as flat
As the head of a cat,
This quadrupetantical Ounce,
—tical Ounce,
This quadrupetantical Ounce.

"You'd think from his name he was small,
But that was not like him at all.
He weighed, I'll be bound,
Three or four hundred pound,
And he looked most uncommonly tall,
—monly tall,
And he looked most uncommonly tall."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Travis, pounding on the table. "Hear, hear—none, Brutus, none."

Condy sat down on the table and swung his legs. But during the next few moments, while they were eating the last of their cheese, his good spirits fell rapidly away from him. He heaved a sigh, and thrust both hands gloomily into his pockets.

"Cheese, Condy?" asked Travis.

He shook his head with a dark frown, muttering: "No cheese, no cheese."

"What's wrong, Condy—what's the matter?" asked Travis, with concern.

For some time he would not tell her, answering all her inquiries by closing his eyes and putting his chin in the air, nodding his head in knowing fashion.

"But what is it?"

"You don't respect me," he muttered; and for a long time this was all that could be got from him. No, no, she did not respect him; no, she did not take him seriously.

"But of course I do. Why don't I? Condy Rivers, what's got into you *now?*"

"No, no; I know it. I can tell. You don't take me seriously. You don't respect me."

"But why?"

"Make a blooming buffoon of myself," he mumbled tragically.

In great distress Travis labored to contradict him. Why, they had just been having a good time, that was all. Why, she had been just as silly as he. Condy caught at the word.

"Silly! There, I knew it. I told you. I'm silly. I'm a buffoon.—But haven't we had a great afternoon?" he added, with a sudden grin.

"I never remember," announced Travis emphatically, "when I've had a better time than I've had to-day; and I know just why it's been such a success."

"Why, then?"

"Because we've had no foolishness. We've just been ourselves, and haven't pretended we were in love with each other when we are not. Condy, let's do this lots."

"Do what?"

"Go round to queer little, interesting little places. We've had a glorious time to-day, haven't we?—and we haven't been talked out once."

"As we were last night, for instance," he hazarded.

"I *thought* you felt it, the same as I did. It *was* a bit awful, wasn't it?"

"It was."

"From now on, let's make a resolution. I know you've had a good time to-day. Haven't you had a better time than if you had gone to the Tea?"

"Well, *rather*. I don't know when I've had a better, jollier afternoon."

"Well, now, we're going to try to have lots more good times, but just as chums. We've tried the other, and it failed. Now be sincere; didn't it fail?"

"It worked out. It *did* work out."

"Now from this time on, no more foolishness. We'll just be chums."

"Chums it is. No more foolishness."

"The moment you begin to pretend you're in love with me, it will spoil everything. It's funny," said Travis, drawing on her gloves. "We're doing a funny thing, Condy. With ninety-nine people out of one hundred, this little affair would have been all ended after our 'explanation' of last night—confessing, as we did, that we didn't love each other. Most couples would have 'drifted apart'; but here we are, planning to be chums, and have good times in our own original, unconventional way—and we can do it, too. There, there, he's a thousand miles away. He's not heard a single word I've said. Condy, are you listening to me?"

"Blix," he murmured, staring at her vaguely. "Blix—you look

that way; I don't know, look kind of blix. Don't you feel sort of blix?" he inquired anxiously.

"Blix?"

He smote the table with his palm. "Capital!" he cried; "sounds bully, and snappy, and crisp, and bright, and sort of sudden. Sounds —don't you know, *this* way?"—and he snapped his fingers. "Don't you see what I mean? Blix, that's who you are. You've always been Blix, and I've just found it out. Blix," he added, listening to the sound of the name. "Blix, Blix. Yes, yes; that's your name."

"Blix?" she repeated; "but why Blix?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not."

"Well, then," he declared, as though that settled the question. They made ready to go, as it was growing late.

"Will you tie that for me, Condy," she asked, rising and turning the back of her head toward him, the ends of the veil held under her fingers. "Not too tight. Condy, don't pull it so tight. There, there, that will do. Have you everything that belongs to you? I know you'll go away and leave something here. There's your cigarette case, and your book, and of course the banjo."

As if warned by a mysterious instinct, the fat Chinaman made his appearance in the outer room. Condy put his fingers into his vest pocket, then dropped back upon his stool with a suppressed exclamation of horror.

"Condy!" exclaimed Blix in alarm, "are you sick?"—for he had turned a positive white.

"I haven't a cent of money," he murmured faintly. "I spent my last quarter for those beastly crackers. What's to be done? What *is* to be done? I'll—I'll leave him my watch. Yes, that's the only thing."

Blix calmly took out her purse. "I expected it," she said resignedly. "I knew this would happen sooner or later, and I always have been prepared. How much is it, John?" she asked of the Chinaman.

"Hefahdollah."

"I'll never be able to look you in the face again," protested Condy. "I'll pay you back to-night. I will! I'll send it up by a messenger boy."

"Then you *would* be a buffoon."

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "Don't, it humiliates me to the dust."

"Oh, come along and don't be so absurd. It must be after five."

Half-way down the brass-bound stairs, he clapped his hand to his head with a start.

"And *now* what is it?" she inquired meekly.

"Forgotten, forgotten!" he exclaimed. "I knew I would forget something."

"*I* knew it, you mean."

He ran back, and returned with the great bag of crackers, and thrust it into her hands. "Here, here, take these. We mustn't leave these," he declared earnestly. "It would be a shameful waste of money;" and in spite of all her protests, he insisted upon taking the crackers along.

"I wonder," said Blix, as the two skirted the Plaza, going down to Kearney Street; "I wonder if I ought to ask him to supper?"

"Ask who—me?—how funny to—"

"I wonder if we are talked out—if it would spoil the day?"

"Anyhow, I'm going to have supper at the Club; and I've got to write my article some time to-night."

Blix fixed him with a swift glance of genuine concern. "Don't play to-night, Condy," she said, with a sudden gravity.

"Fat lot *I* can play! What money have I got to play with?"

"You might get some somewheres. But, anyhow, promise me you won't play."

"Well, of course I'll promise. How can I, if I haven't any money? And besides, I've got my whaleback stuff to write. I'll have supper at the Club, and go up in the library and grind out copy for a while."

"Condy," said Blix, "I think that diver's story is almost too good for 'The Times.' Why don't you write it and send it East? Send it to the Centennial Company, why don't you? They've paid some attention to you now, and it would keep your name in their minds if you sent the story to them, even if they didn't publish it. Why don't you think of that?"

"Fine—great idea! I'll do that. Only I'll have to write it out of business hours. It will be extra work."

"Never mind, you do it; and," she added, as he put her on the cable car, "keep your mind on that thirty-thousand-word story of adventure. Good-by, Condy; haven't we had the jolliest day that ever was?"

"Couldn't have been better. Good-by, Blix."

Condy returned to his club. It was about six o'clock. In re-

sponse to his question, the hall-boy told him that Tracy Sargeant had arrived a few moments previous, and had been asking for him.

The Saturday of the week before, Condy had made an engagement with young Sargeant to have supper together that night, and perhaps go to the theatre afterward. And now at the sight of Sargeant in the "round window" of the main room, buried in the file of the "Gil Blas," Condy was pleased to note that neither of them had forgotten the matter.

Sargeant greeted him with extreme cordiality as he came up, and at once proposed a drink. Sargeant was a sleek, well-groomed, well-looking fellow of thirty, just beginning to show the effects of a certain amount of dissipation in the little puffs under the eyes and the faint blueness of the temples. The sudden death of his father, for which event Sargeant was still mourning, had left him in such position that his monthly income was about five times as large as Condy's salary. The two had supper together, and Sargeant proposed the theatre.

"No, no; I've got to work to-night," asserted Condy.

After dinner, while they were smoking their cigars in a window of the main room, one of the hall-boys came up and touched Condy on the arm.

"Mr. Eckert, and Mr. Hendricks, and Mr. George Hands, and several other of those gentlemen are up in the card-room, and are asking for you and Mr. Sargeant."

"Why, I didn't know the boys were here! They've got a game going, Condy. Let's go up and get in. Shall we?"

Condy remembered that he had no money. "I'm flat broke, Tracy," he announced, for he knew Sargeant well enough to make the confession without wincing. "No, I'll not get in; but I'll go up and watch you a few minutes."

They ascended to the card-room, where the air was heavy and acrid with cigar smoke, and where the silence was broken only by the click of poker-chips. At the end of twenty minutes Condy was playing, having borrowed enough money of Sargeant to start him in the game.

Unusually talkative and restless, he had suddenly hardened and stiffened to a repressed, tense calm; speechless, almost rigid in his chair. Excitable under even ordinary circumstances, his every faculty was now keyed to its highest pitch. The nervous strain upon him was like the stretching and tightening of harp-strings, too taut

to quiver. The color left his face, and the moisture fled his lips. His projected article, his promise to Blix, all the jollity of the afternoon, all thought of time or place, faded away as the one indomitable, evil passion of the man leaped into life within him, and lashed and roweled him with excitement. His world resolved itself to a round green table, columns of tri-colored chips, and five ever-changing cards that came and went and came again before his tired eyes like the changing, weaving colors of the kaleidoscope. Midnight struck, then one o'clock, then two, three, and four. Still his passion rode him like a hag, spurring the jaded body, rousing up the wearied brain.

Finally, at half-past four, at a time when Condy was precisely where he had started, neither winner nor loser by so much as a dime, a round of Jack-pots was declared, and the game broke up. Condy walked home to the uptown hotel where he lived with his mother, and went to bed as the first milk-wagons began to make their appearance and the newsboys to cry the morning papers.

Then, as his tired eyes closed at last, occurred that strange trick of picture-making that the overtaxed brain plays upon the retina. A swift series of pictures of the day's doings began to whirl *through* rather than *before* the pupils of his shut eyes. Condy saw again a brief vision of the street, and Blix upon the corner waiting to cross; then it was the gay, brisk confusion of the water-front, the old mate's cabin aboard the whaleback, Chinatown, and a loop of vermilion cloth over a gallery rail, the golden balcony, the glint of the Stevenson ship upon the green Plaza, Blix playing the banjo, the delightful and picturesque confusion of the deserted Chinese restaurant; Blix again, turning her head for him to fasten her veil, holding the ends with her white-kid fingers; Blix once more, walking at his side with her trim black skirt, her round little turban hat, her yellow hair, and her small dark, dancing eyes.

Then, suddenly, he remembered the promise he had made her in the matter of playing that night. He winced sharply at this, and the remembrance of his fault harried and harassed him. In spite of himself, he felt contemptible. Yet he had broken his promises to her in this very matter of playing before—before that day of their visit to the Chinese restaurant—and had felt no great qualm of self-reproach. Had their relations changed? Rather the reverse, for they had done with "foolishness."

"Never worried me before," muttered Condy, as he punched up

his pillow—"never worried me before. Why should it worry me now—worry me like the devil;—and she caught on to that 'point' about the slope of forty-five degrees."

V

Condy began his week's work for the supplement behindhand. Naturally he overslept himself Tuesday morning, and, not having any change in his pockets, was obliged to walk down to the office. He arrived late, to find the compositors already fretting for copy. His editor promptly asked for the whaleback stuff, and Condy was forced into promising it within a half-hour. It was out of the question to write the article according to his own idea in so short a time; so Condy faked the stuff from the exchange clipping, after all. His description of the boat and his comments upon her mission—taken largely at second hand—served only to fill space in the paper. They were lacking both in interest and in point. There were no illustrations. The article was a failure.

But Condy redeemed himself by a witty interview later in the week with an emotional actress, and by a solemn article—compiled after an hour's reading in Lafcadio Hearn and the Encyclopedia—on the "Industrial Renaissance in Japan."

But the idea of the diver's story came back to him again and again, and Thursday night after supper he went down to his club, and hid himself at a corner desk in the library, and, in a burst of enthusiasm, wrote out some two thousand words of it. In order to get the "technical details," upon which he set such store, he consulted the Encyclopedias again, and "worked in" a number of unfamiliar phrases and odd-sounding names. He was so proud of the result that he felt he could not wait until the tale was finished and in print to try its effect. He wanted appreciation and encouragement upon the instant. He thought of Blix.

"She saw the point in Morrowbie Jukes' description of the slope of the sandhill," he told himself; and the next moment had resolved to go up and see her the next evening, and read to her what he had written.

This was on Thursday. All through that week Blix had kept much to herself, and for the first time in two years had begun to spend every evening at home. In the morning of each day she helped Victorine with the upstairs work, making the beds, putting the

rooms to rights; or consulted with the butcher's and grocer's boys at the head of the back stairs, or chaffered with urbane and smiling Chinamen with their balanced vegetable baskets. She knew the house and its management at her fingers' ends, and supervised everything that went forward. Laurie Flagg coming to call upon her, on Wednesday afternoon, to remonstrate upon her sudden defection, found her in the act of tacking up a curtain across the pantry window.

But Blix had the afternoons and evenings almost entirely to herself. These hours, heretofore taken up with functions and the discharge of obligations, dragged not a little during the week that followed upon her declaration of independence. Wednesday afternoon, however, was warm and fine, and she went to the Park with Snooky. Without looking for it or even expecting it, Blix came across a little Japanese tea-house, or rather a tiny Japanese garden, set with almost toy Japanese houses and pavilions, where tea was served and thin sweetish wafers for five cents. Blix and Snooky went in. There was nobody about but the Japanese serving woman. Snooky was in raptures, and Blix spent a delightful half-hour there, drinking Japanese tea, and feeding the wafers to the carp and goldfish in the tiny pond immediately below where she sat. A Chinaman, evidently of the merchant class, came in, with a Chinese woman following. As he took his place and the Japanese girl came up to get his order, Blix overheard him say in English: "Bring tea for-um leddy."

"He had to speak in English to her," she whispered; "isn't that splendid! Did you notice that, Snooky?"

On the way home Blix was wondering how she should pass her evening. She was to have made one of a theatre party where Jack Carter was to be present. Then she suddenly remembered "Morrowbie Jukes," "The Return of Imri," and "Krishna Mulvaney." She continued on past her home, downtown, and returned late for supper with "Plain Tales" and "Many Inventions."

Toward half-past eight there came a titter of the electric bell. At the moment Blix was in the upper chamber of the house of Suddhoo, quaking with exquisite horror at the Seal-cutter's magic. She looked up quickly as the bell rang. It was not Condy Rivers' touch. She swiftly reflected that it was Wednesday night, and that she might probably expect Frank Catlin. He was a fair specimen of the Younger Set, a sort of modified Jack Carter, and called upon her about once a fortnight. No doubt he would hint darkly as to his

riotous living during the past few days and refer to his diet of bromo-seltzers. He would be slangy, familiar, call her by her first name as many times as he dared, discuss the last dance of the Saturday cotillion, and try to make her laugh over Carter's drunkenness Blix knew the type. Catlin was hardly out of college; but the older girls, even the young women of twenty-five or six, encouraged and petted these youngsters, driven to the alternative by the absolute dearth of older men.

"I'm not at home, Victorine," announced Blix, intercepting the maid in the hall. It chanced that it was not Frank Catlin, but another boy of precisely the same breed; and Blix returned to Suddhoo, Mrs. Hawksbee, and Mulvaney with a little cuddling movement of satisfaction.

"There is only one thing I regret about this," she said to Condy Rivers on the Friday night of that week; "that is, that I never thought of doing it before." Then suddenly she put up her hand to shield her eyes, as though from an intense light, turning away her head abruptly.

"I say, what is it? What—what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

Blix peeped at him fearfully from between her fingers. "He's got it on," she whispered—"that awful crimson scarf."

"Hoh!" said Condy, touching his scarf nervously, "it's—it's very swell. Is it too loud?" he asked uneasily.

Blix put her fingers in her ears; then:

"Condy, you're a nice, amiable young man, and, if you're not brilliant, you're good and kind to your aged mother; but your scarfs and neckties are simply impossible."

"Well, look at this room!" he shouted—they were in the parlor. "You needn't talk about bad taste. Those drapes—oh-h! those drapes!! Yellow, s'help me! And those bisque figures that you get with every pound of tea you buy; and this, this, *this*," he whimpered, waving his hands at the decorated sewer-pipe with its gilded cat-tails. "Oh, speak to me of this; speak to me of art; speak to me of æsthetics. Cat-tails, *gilded*. Of course, why not *gilded!*" He wrung his hands. "'Somewhere people are happy. Somewhere little children are at play—'"

"Oh, hush!" she interrupted. "I know it's bad; but we've always had it so, and I won't have it abused. Let's go into the dining-room, anyway. We'll sit in there after this. We've always been stiff and constrained in here."

They went out into the dining-room, and drew up a couple of

arm-chairs into the bay window, and sat there looking out. Blix had not yet lighted the gas—it was hardly dark enough for that; and for upward of ten minutes they sat and watched the evening dropping into night.

Below them the hill fell away so abruptly that the roofs of the nearest houses were almost at their feet; and beyond these the city tumbled raggedly down to meet the bay in a confused, vague mass of roofs, cornices, cupolas, and chimneys, blurred and indistinct in the twilight, but here and there pierced by a new-lighted street lamp. Then came the bay. To the east they could see Goat Island, and the fleet of sailing-ships anchored off the water-front; while directly in their line of vision the island of Alcatraz, with its triple crown of forts, started from the surface of the water. Beyond was the Contra Costa shore, a vast streak of purple against the sky. The eye followed its sky-line westward till it climbed, climbed, climbed up a long slope that suddenly leaped heavenward with the crest of Tamalpais, purple and still, looking always to the sunset like a great watching sphinx. Then, further on, the slope seemed to break like the breaking of an advancing billow, and go tumbling, crumbling downward to meet the Golden Gate—the narrow inlet of green tide-water with its flanking Presidio. But, further than this, the eye was stayed. Further than this there was nothing, nothing but a vast, illimitable plain of green—the open Pacific. But at this hour the color of the scene was its greatest charm. It glowed with all the sombre radiance of a cathedral. Everything was seen through a haze of purple—from the low green hills in the Presidio Reservation to the faint red mass of Mount Diablo shrugging its rugged shoulder over the Contra Costa foot-hills. As the evening faded, the west burned down to a dull red glow that overlaid the blue of the bay with a sheen of ruddy gold. The foot-hills of the opposite shore, Diablo, and at last even Tamalpais, resolved themselves in the velvet gray of the sky. Outlines were lost. Only the masses remained, and these soon began to blend into one another. The sky, and land, and the city's huddled roofs were one. Only the sheen of dull gold remained, piercing the single vast mass of purple like the blade of a golden sword.

"There's a ship!" said Blix in a low tone.

A four-master was dropping quietly through the Golden Gate, swimming on that sheen of gold, a mere shadow, specked with lights, red and green. In a few moments her bows were shut from sight by the old fort at the Gate. Then her red light vanished, then

the mainmast. She was gone. By midnight she would be out of sight of land, rolling on the swell of the lonely ocean under the moon's white eye.

Condy and Blix sat quiet and without speech, not caring to break the charm of the evening. For quite five minutes they sat thus, watching the stars light one by one, and the immense gray night settle and broaden and widen from mountain-top to horizon. They did not feel the necessity of making conversation. There was no constraint in their silence now.

Gently, and a little at a time, Condy turned his head and looked at Blix. There was just light enough to see. She was leaning back in her chair, her hands fallen into her lap, her head back and a little to one side. As usual, she was in black; but now it was some sort of dinner-gown that left her arms and neck bare. The line of the chin and the throat and the sweet round curve of the shoulder had in it something indescribable—something that was related to music, and that eluded speech. Her hair was nothing more than a warm colored mist without form or outline. The sloe-brown of her little eyes and the flush of her cheek were mere inferences—like the faintest stars that are never visible when looked at directly; and it seemed to him that there was disengaged from her something for which there was no name; something that appealed to a mysterious sixth sense—a sense that only stirred at such quiet moments as this; something that was now a dim, sweet radiance, now a faint aroma, and now again a mere essence, an influence, an impression—nothing more. It seemed to him as if her sweet, clean purity and womanliness took a form of its own which his accustomed senses were too gross to perceive. Only a certain vague tenderness in him went out to meet and receive this impalpable presence; a tenderness not for her only, but for all the good things of the world. Often he had experienced the same feeling when listening to music. Her sweetness, her goodness, appealed to what he guessed must be the noblest in him. And she was only nineteen. Suddenly his heart swelled, the ache came to his throat and the smart to his eyes.

"Blixy," he said, just above a whisper; "Blixy, wish I was a better sort of chap."

"That's the beginning of being better, isn't it, Condy?" she answered, turning toward him, her chin on her hand.

"It does seem a pity," he went on, "that when you *want* to do the right, straight thing, and be clean and fine, that you can't just *be* it, and have it over with. It's the keeping it up that's the grind."

"But it's the keeping it up, Condy, that makes you *worth being good* when you finally get to be good; don't you think? It's the keeping it up that makes you strong; and then when you get to be good you can make your goodness count. What's a good man if he's weak?—if his goodness is better than he is himself? It's the good man who is strong—as strong as his goodness, and who can make his goodness count—who is the right kind of man. That's what I think."

There's something in that, there's something in that." Then, after a pause: "I played Monday night, after all, Blix, after promising I wouldn't."

For a time she did not answer, and when she spoke, she spoke quietly: "Well—I'm glad you told me"; and after a little she added, "Can't you stop, Condy?"

"Why, yes—yes, of course—I—oh, Blix, sometimes I don't know! You can't understand! How could a girl understand the power of it? Other things, I don't say; but when it comes to gambling, there seems to be another *me* that does precisely as he chooses, whether *I* will or not. But I'm going to do my best. I haven't played since, although there was plenty of chance. You see, this card business is only a part of this club life, this city life—like drinking and—other vices of men. If I didn't have to lead the life, or if I didn't go with that crowd—Sargeant and the rest of those men—it would be different; easier, maybe."

"But a man ought to be strong enough to be himself and master of himself anywhere. Condy, *is* there anything in the world better or finer than a strong man?"

"Not unless it is a good woman, Blix."

"I suppose I look at it from a woman's point of view; but for me a *strong* man—strong in everything—is the grandest thing in the world. Women love strong men, Condy. They can forgive a strong man almost anything."

Condy did not immediately answer, and in the interval an idea occurred to Blix that at once hardened into a determination. But she said nothing at the moment. The spell of the sunset was gone, and they had evidently reached the end of that subject of their talk. Blix rose to light the gas. Will you promise me one thing, Condy?" she said. "Don't if you don't want to. But will you promise me that you will tell me whenever you do play?"

"That I'll promise you!" exclaimed Condy; "and I'll keep that, too."

"And now, let's hear the story—or what you've done of it."

They drew up to the dining-room table with its cover of blue denim edged with white cord, and Condy unrolled his manuscript and read through what he had written. She approved, and, as he had foreseen, "caught on" to every one of his points. He was almost ready to burst into cheers when she said:

"Any one reading that would almost believe you had been a diver yourself, or at least had lived with divers. Those little details count, don't they? Condy, I've an idea. See what you think of it. Instead of having the story end with his leaving her down there and going away, do it this way. Let him leave her there, and then go back after a long time when he gets to be an old man. Fix it up some way to make it natural. Have him go down to see her and never come up again, see? And leave the reader in doubt as to whether it was an accident or whether he did it on purpose."

Condy choked back a whoop and smote his knee. "Blix, you're the eighth wonder! Magnificent—glorious! Say!"—he fixed her with a glance of curiosity—"you ought to take to story-writing yourself."

"No, no," she retorted significantly. "I'll just stay with my singing and be content with that. But remember that story don't go to 'The Times' supplement. At least not until you have tried it East—with the Centennial Company, at any rate."

"Well, I guess *not!*" snorted Condy. "Why, this is going to be one of the best yarns I ever wrote."

A little later on he inquired with sudden concern: "Have you got anything to eat in the house?"

"I never saw such a man!" declared Blix; "you are always hungry."

"I love to eat," he protested.

"Well, we'll make some creamed oysters; how would that do?" suggested Blix.

Condy rolled his eyes. "Oh, speak to me of creamed oysters!" Then, with abrupt solemnity: "Blix, I never in my life had as many oysters as I could eat."

She made the creamed oysters in the kitchen over the gas-stove, and they ate them there—Condy sitting on the washboard of the sink, his plate in his lap.

Condy had a way of catching up in his hands whatever happened to be nearest him, and, while still continuing to talk, examining it with apparent deep interest. Just now it happened to be the morn-

ing's paper that Victorine had left on the table. For five minutes Condy had been picking it up and laying it down, frowning abstractedly at it during the pauses in the conversation. Suddenly he became aware of what it was, and instantly read aloud the first item that caught his glance:

" 'Personal.—Young woman, thirty-one, good housekeeper, desires acquaintance respectable middle-aged gentleman. Object, matrimony. Address K. D. B., this office.'—Hum!" he commented, "nothing equivocal about K. D. B.; has the heroism to call herself young at thirty-one. I'll bet she *is* a good housekeeper. Right to the point. If K. D. B. don't see what she wants, she asks for it."

"I wonder," mused Blix, "what kind of people they are who put personals in the papers. K. D. B., for instance; who is she, and what is she like?"

"They're not tough," Condy assured her. "I see 'em often down at 'The Times' office. They are usually a plain, matter-of-fact sort, quite conscientious, you know; generally middle-aged—or thirty-one; outgrown their youthful follies and illusions, and want to settle down."

"Read some more," urged Blix. Condy went on.

" 'Bachelor, good habits, twenty-five, affectionate disposition, accomplishments, money, desires acquaintance pretty, refined girl. Object, matrimony. McB., this office.' "

"No, I don't like McB.," said Blix. "He's too—ornamental, somehow."

"He wouldn't do for K. D. B., would he?"

"Oh, my, no! He'd make her very unhappy."

" 'Widower, two children, home-loving disposition, desires introduction to good, honest woman to make home for his children. Matrimony, if suitable. B. P. T., Box A, this office.' "

"He's not for K. D. B., that's flat," declared Blix; "the idea, 'matrimony if suitable'—patronizing enough! I know just what kind of an old man B. P. T. is. I know he would want K. D. B. to warm his slippers, and would be fretful and grumpy. B. P. T., just an abbreviation of bumptious. No, he can't have her."

Condy read the next two or three to himself, despite her protests.

"Condy, don't be mean! Read them to—"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "here's one for K. D. B. Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Listen."

" 'Bachelor, thirty-nine, sober and industrious, retired sea cap-

tain, desires acquaintance respectable young woman, good housekeeper and manager. Object, matrimony. Address Captain Jack, office this paper."

"I know he's got a wooden leg!" cried Blix. "Can't you just see it sticking out between the lines? And he lives all alone somewhere down near the bay with a parrot—"

"And makes a glass of grog every night."

"And smokes a long clay pipe."

"But he chews tobacco."

"Yes, isn't it a pity he will chew that nasty, smelly tobacco? But K. D. B. will break him of that."

"Oh, is he for K. D. B.?"

"Sent by Providence!" declared Blix. "They were born for each other. Just see, K. D. B. is a good housekeeper, and wants a respectable middle-aged gentleman. Captain Jack is a respectable middle-aged gentleman, and wants a good housekeeper. Oh, and besides, I can read between the lines! I just feel they would be congenial. If they know what's best for themselves, they would write to each other right away."

"But wouldn't you love to be there and see them meet!" exclaimed Condy.

"Can't we fix it up some way," said Blix, "to bring these two together—to help them out in some way?"

Condy smote the table and jumped to his feet.

"Write to 'em!" he shouted. "Write to K. D. B. and sign it Captain Jack, and write to Captain Jack—"

"And sign it K. D. B.," she interrupted, catching his idea.

"And have him tell her, and her tell him," he added, "to meet at some place; and then we can go to that place and hide, and watch."

"But how will we know them? How would they know each other? They've never met."

"We'll tell them both to wear a kind of flower. Then we can know them, and they can know each other. Of course as soon as they began to talk they would find out they hadn't written."

"But they wouldn't care."

"No—they *want* to meet each other. They would be thankful to us for bringing them together."

"Won't it be the greatest fun?"

"Fun! Why, it will be a regular drama. Only we are running the show, and everything is real. Let's get at it!"

Blix ran into her room and returned with writing material. Condy looked at the note-paper critically. "This kind's too swell. K. D. B. wouldn't use Irish linen—never! Here, this is better, glazed with blue lines and a flying bird stamped in the corner. Now I'll write for the Captain, and you write for K. D. B."

"But where will we have them meet?"

This was a point. They considered the Chinese restaurant, the Plaza, Lotta's fountain, the Mechanics' Library, and even the cathedral over in the Mexican quarter, but arrived at no decision.

"Did you ever hear of Luna's restaurant?" said Condy. "By Jove, it's just the place! It's the restaurant where you get Mexican dinners; right in the heart of the Latin quarter; quiet little old-fashioned place, below the level of the street, respectable as a tomb. I was there just once. We'll have 'em meet there at seven in the evening. No one is there at that hour. The place isn't patronized much, and it shuts up at eight. You and I can go there and have dinner at six, say, and watch for them to come."

Then they set to work at their letters.

"Now," said Condy, "we must have these sound perfectly natural, because if either of these people smell the smallest kind of a rat, you won't catch 'em. You must write not as *you* would write, but as you think *they* would. This is an art, a kind of fiction, don't you see? We must imagine a certain character, and write a letter consistent with that character. Then it'll sound natural. Now, K. D. B. Well, K. D. B., she's prim. Let's have her prim, and proud of using correct, precise, 'elegant' language. I guess she wears mits, and believes in cremation. Let's have her believe in cremation. And Captain Jack; oh! he's got a terrible voice, like this, *row-row-row*, see? and whiskers, very fierce; and he says, 'Belay there!' and 'Avast!' and is very grandiloquent and orotund and gallant when it comes to women. Oh, he's the devil of a man when it comes to women, is Captain Jack!"

After countless trials and failures, they evolved the two following missives, which Condy posted that night:

"*Captain Jack.*

"SIR:—I have perused with entire satisfaction your personal in 'The Times.' I should like to know more of you. I read between the lines, and my perception ineradicably convinces me that you are honest and respectable. I do not believe I should compromise my self-esteem at all in granting you an interview. I shall be at Luna's restaurant at seven pre-

cisely, next Monday eve, and will bear a bunch of white marguerites. Will you likewise, and wear a marguerite in your lapel?

"Trusting this will find you in health, I am

"Respectfully yours,
"K. D. B."

"*Miss K. D. B.*

"DEAR MISS:—From the modest and retiring description of your qualities and character, I am led to believe that I will find in you an agreeable life companion. Will you not accord me the great favor of a personal interview? I shall esteem it a high honor. I will be at Luna's Mexican restaurant at seven of the clock P.M. on Monday evening next. May I express the fervent hope that you also will be there? I name the locality because it is quiet and respectable. I shall wear a white marguerite in my buttonhole. Will you also carry a bunch of the same flower?

"Yours to command,
"CAPTAIN JACK."

So great was her interest in the affair that Blix even went out with Condy while he mailed the letters in the nearest box, for he was quite capable of forgetting the whole matter as soon as he was out of the house.

"Now let it work!" she exclaimed as the iron flap clanked down upon the disappearing envelopes. But Condy was suddenly smitten with nameless misgiving. "Now we've done it! now we've done it!" he cried aghast. "I wish we hadn't. We're in a fine fix now."

Still uneasy, he saw Blix back to the flat, and bade her good-by at the door.

But before she went to bed that night, Blix sought out her father, who was still sitting up tinkering with the cuckoo clock, which he had taken all to pieces under the pretext that it was out of order and went too fast.

"Papum," said Blix, sitting down on the rug before him, "did you ever—when you were a pioneer, when you first came out here in the fifties—did you ever play poker?"

"I—oh, well! it was the only amusement the miners had for a long time."

"I want you to teach me."

The old man let the clock fall into his lap and stared. But Blix explained her reasons.

VI

The next day was Saturday, and Blix had planned a walk out to the Presidio. But at breakfast, while she was debating whether she should take with her Howard and Snooky, or "Many Inventions," she received a note from Condy, sent by special messenger:

"'All our fun is spoiled,' he wrote. 'I've got ptomaine poisoning from eating the creamed oysters last night, and am in for a solid fortnight spent in bed. Have passed a horrible night. Can't you look in at the hotel this afternoon? My mother will be here at the time.'"

"Ptomaine poisoning!" The name had an ugly sound, and Condy's use of the term inferred the doctor's visit. Blix decided that she would put off her walk until the afternoon, and call on Mrs. Rivers at once, and ask how Condy did.

She got away from the flat about ten o'clock, but on the steps outside met Condy dressed as if for bicycling, and smoking a cigarette.

"I've got eleven dollars!" he announced cheerily.

"But I thought it was ptomaine poisoning!" she cried with sudden vexation.

"Pshaw! that's what the doctor says. He's a flapdoodle; nothing but a kind of a sort of a pain. It's all gone now. I'm as fit as a fiddle—and I've got eleven dollars. Let's go somewhere and do something."

"But your work?"

"They don't expect me. When I thought I was going to be sick, I telephoned the office, and they said all right, that they didn't need me. Now I've got eleven dollars, and there are three holidays of perfect weather before us: to-day, to-morrow, and Monday. What will we do? What must we do to be saved? Our matrimonial objects don't materialize till Monday night. In the meanwhile, what? Shall we go down to Chinatown—to the restaurant, or to the water-front again? Maybe the mate on the whaleback would invite us to lunch. Or," added Condy, his eye caught by a fresh-fish peddler who had just turned into the street, "we can go fishing."

"For oysters, perhaps."

But the idea had caught Condy's fancy.

"Blix!" he exclaimed, "let's go fishing."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Where *do* people fish around here? Where there's water, I presume."

"No, is it possible?" she asked with deep concern. "I thought they fished in their back yards, or in their front parlors perhaps."

"Oh, you be quiet! you're all the time guying me," he answered. "Let me think—let me think," he went on, frowning heavily, scouring at his hair. Suddenly he slapped a thigh.

"Come on," he cried, "I've an idea!" He was already half-way down the steps, when Blix called him back.

"Leave it all to me," he assured her; "trust me *implicitly*. Don't you want to go?" he demanded with abrupt disappointment.

"Want to!" she exclaimed. "Why, it would be the very best kind of fun, but—"

"Well, then, come along."

They took a downtown car.

"I've got a couple of split bamboo rods," he explained as the car slid down the terrific grade of the Washington-Street hill. "I haven't used 'em in years—not since we lived East; but they're hand-made, and are tip-top. I haven't any other kind of tackle; but it's just as well, because the tackle will all depend upon where we are going to fish."

"Where's that?"

"Don't know yet; am going down now to find out."

He took her down to the principal dealer in sporting goods on Market Street. It was a delicious world, whose atmosphere and charm were not to be resisted. There were shot-guns in rows, their gray barrels looking like so many organ-pipes; sheaves of fishing-rods, from the four-ounce whisp of the brook-trout up to the rigid eighteen-ounce lance of the king-salmon and sea-bass; showcases of wicked revolvers, swelling by calibres into the thirty-eight and forty-four man-killers of the plainsmen and Arizona cavalry; hunting knives and dirks, and the slender steel whips of the fencers; files of Winchesters, sleeping quietly in their racks, waiting patiently for the signal to speak the one grim word they knew; swarms of artificial flies of every conceivable shade, brown, gray, black, gray-brown, gray-black, with here and there a brisk vermilion note; coils of line, from the thickness of a pencil, spun to hold the sullen plunges of a jew-fish off the Catalina Islands, down to the sea-

green gossamers that a vigorous fingerling might snap; hooks, snells, guts, leaders, gaffs, cartridges, shells, and all the entrancing munitions of the sportsman, that savored of lonely cañons, deer-licks, mountain streams, quail uplands, and the still reaches of inlet and marsh grounds, gray and cool in the early autumn dawn.

Condy and Blix got the attention of a clerk, and Condy explained.

"I want to go fishing—*we* want to go fishing. We want some place where we can go and come in the same day, and we want to catch fair-sized fish—no minnows."

The following half-hour was charming. Never was there a clerk more delightful. It would appear that his one object in life was that Condy and Blix should catch fish. The affairs of the nation stood still while he pondered, suggested, advised, and deliberated. He told them where to go, how to get there, what train to take coming back, and who to ask for when they arrived. They would have to wait till Monday before going, but could return long before the fated hour of 7 P. M.

"Ask for Richardson," said the clerk; "and here, give him my card. He'll put you on to the good spots; some places are A-1 to-day, and to-morrow in the same place you can't kill a single fish."

Condy nudged Blix as the Mentor turned away to get his card.

"Notice that," he whispered: "*kill* a fish. You don't say 'catch,' you say 'kill'—technical detail."

Then they bought their tackle: a couple of cheap reels, lines, leaders, sinkers, a book of assorted flies that the delightful clerk suggested, and a beautiful little tin box painted green, and stenciled with a gorgeous gold trout upon the lid, in which they were to keep the pint of salted shrimps to be used as bait in addition to the flies. Blix would get these shrimps at a little market near her home.

"But," said the clerk, "you got to get a permit to fish in that lake. Have you got a pull with the Water Company? Are you a stockholder?"

Condy's face fell, and Blix gave a little gasp of dismay. They looked at each other. Here was a check, indeed.

"Well," said the sublime being in shirt sleeves from behind the counter, "see what you can do; and if you can't make it, come back here an' lemmeno, and we'll fix you up in some other place. But Lake San Andreas has been bang-up this last week—been some great kills there; hope to the deuce you can make it."

Everything now hinged upon this permit. It was not until their expedition had been in doubt that Condy and Blix realized how alluring had been its prospects.

"Oh, I guess you can get a permit," said the clerk soothingly. "An' if you make any good kills, lemmeno and I'll put it in the paper. I'm the editor of the 'Sport-with-Gun-and-Rod' column in 'The Press,'" he added with a flush of pride.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Blix, who was waiting at home, in great suspense, for that very purpose, received another telegram from Condy:

"Tension of situation relieved. Unconditional permission obtained. Don't forget the shrimps."

It had been understood that Condy was to come to the flat on Sunday afternoon to talk over final arrangements with Blix. But as it was, Saturday evening saw him again at the Bessemers.

He had been down at his club in the library, writing the last paragraphs of his diver's story, when, just as he finished, Sargeant discovered him.

"Why, Conny, old man, all alone here? Let's go downstairs and have a cigar. Hendricks and George Hands are coming around in half an hour. They told me not to let you get away."

Condy stirred nervously in his chair. He knew what that meant. He had enough money in his pockets to play that night, and in an instant the enemy was all awake. The rowel was in his flank again, and the scourge at his back. Sargeant stood there, the well-groomed clubman of thirty; a little cynical perhaps, but a really good fellow for all that, and undeniably fond of Condy. But somewhere with the eyes of some second self Condy saw the girl of nineteen, part child and part woman; saw her goodness, her fine, sweet feminine strength as it were a dim radiance; "What's a good man worth, Condy," she had said, "if he's not a strong man?"

"I suppose we'll have a game going before midnight," admitted Sargeant resignedly, smiling good-humoredly nevertheless.

Condy set his teeth. "I'll join you later. Wait a few moments," he said. He hurried to the office of the club, and sent a despatch to Blix—the third since morning:

"Can I come up right away? It's urgent. Send answer by this messenger."

He got his answer within three-quarters of an hour, and left the

club as Hendricks and George Hands arrived by the elevator entrance.

Sitting in the bay window of the dining-room, he told Blix why he had come.

"Oh, you were right!" she told him. "Always, *always* come, when—when you feel you must."

"It gets so bad sometimes, Blix," he confessed with abject self-contempt, "that when I can't get some one to play against I'll sit down and deal dummy hands, and bet on them. Just the touch of the cards—just the *feel* of the chips. Faugh! it's shameful."

The day following, Sunday, Condy came to tea as usual; and after the meal, as soon as the family and Victorine had left the pair alone in the dining-room, they set about preparing for their morrow's excursion. Blix put up their lunch—sandwiches of what Condy called "devilish" ham, hard-boiled eggs, stuffed olives, and a bottle of claret.

Condy took off his coat and made a great show of stringing the tackle: winding the lines from the spools on to the reels, and attaching the sinkers and flies to the leaders, smoking the while, and scowling fiercely. He got the lines fearfully and wonderfully snarled, he caught the hooks in the table-cloth, he lost the almost invisible gut leaders on the floor and looped the sinkers on the lines when they should have gone on the leaders. In the end Blix had to help him out, disentangling the lines foot by foot with a patience that seemed to Condy little short of superhuman.

At nine o'clock she said decisively:

"Do you know what time we must get up in the morning if we are to have breakfast and get the seven-forty train? Quarter of six by the latest, and *you* must get up earlier than that, because you're at the hotel and have further to go. Come here for breakfast, and—listen—be here by half-past six—are you *listening,* Condy?—and we'll go down to the depot from here. Don't forget to bring the rods."

"I'll wear my bicycle suit," he said, "and one of those golf scarfs that wrap around your neck."

"No," she declared, "I won't have it. Wear the oldest clothes you've got, but look fairly respectable, because we're to go to Luna's when we get back, remember. And now go home; you need all the sleep you can get if you are to get up at six o'clock."

Instead of being late, as Blix had feared, Condy was absurdly ahead of time the next morning. For a wonder, he had not for-

gotten the rods; but he was one tremor of nervousness. He would eat no breakfast.

"We're going to miss that train," he would announce from time to time; "I just know it. Blix, look what time it is. We ought to be on the way to the depot now. Come on; you don't want any more coffee. Have you got everything? Did you put the reels in the lunch-basket?—and the fly-book? Lord, if we should forget the fly-book!"

He managed to get her to the depot over half an hour ahead of time. The train had not even backed in, nor the ticket office opened.

"I told you, Condy, I told you," complained Blix, sinking helplessly upon a bench in the waiting-room.

"No—no—no," he answered vaguely, looking nervously about, his head in the air. "We're none too soon—have more time to rest now. I wonder what track the train leaves from. I wonder if it stops at San Bruno. I wonder how far it is from San Bruno to Lake San Andreas. I'm afraid it's going to rain. Heavens and earth, Blix, we forgot the shrimps!"

"No, *no!* Sit down, I've got the shrimps. Condy, you make me so nervous I shall scream in a minute."

Some three-quarters of an hour later the train had set them down at San Bruno—nothing more than a road-house, the headquarters for duck-shooters and fishermen from the city. However, Blix and Condy were the only visitors. Everybody seemed to be especially nice to them on that wonderful morning. Even the supercilious ticket-seller at the San Francisco depot had unbent, and wished them good luck. The conductor of the train had shown himself affable. The very brakeman had gone out of his way to apprise them, quite five minutes ahead of time, that "the next stop was their place." And at San Bruno the proprietor of the road-house himself hitched up to drive them over to the lake, announcing that he would call for them at "Richardson's" in time for the evening train.

"And he only asked me four bits for both trips," whispered Condy to Blix as they jogged along.

The country was beautiful. It was hardly eight o'clock, and the morning still retained much of the brisk effervescence of the early dawn. Great bare, rolling hills of gray-green, thinly scattered with live-oak, bore back from the road on either hand. The sky was pale blue. There was a smell of cows in the air, and twice they heard an unseen lark singing. It was very still. The old

buggy and complacent horse were embalmed in a pungent aroma of old leather and of stables that was entrancing; and a sweet smell of grass and sap came to them in occasional long whiffs. There was exhilaration in the very thought of being alive on that odorous, still morning. The young blood went spanking in the veins. Blix's cheeks were ruddy, her little dark-brown eyes fairly coruscating with pleasure.

"Condy, isn't it all splendid?" she suddenly burst out.

"I feel regularly bigger," he declared solemnly. "I could do anything a morning like this."

Then they came to the lake, and to Richardson's, where the farmer lived who was also the custodian of the lake. The complacent horse jogged back, and Condy and Blix set about the serious business of the day. Condy had no need to show Richardson the delightful sporting clerk's card. The old Yankee—his twang and dry humor singularly incongruous on that royal morning—was solicitude itself. He picked out the best boat on the beach for them, loaned them his own anchor of railroad iron, indicated minutely the point on the opposite shore off which the last big trout had been "killed," and wetted himself to his ankles as he pushed off the boat.

Condy took the oars. Blix sat in the stern, jointing the rods and running the lines through the guides. She even baited the hooks with the salt shrimp herself, and by nine o'clock they were at anchor some forty feet off shore, and fishing, according to Richardson's advice, "a leetle mite off the edge o' the weeds."

"If we don't get a bite the whole blessed day," said Condy, as he paid out his line to the ratchet music of the reel, "we'll have fun just the same. Look around—isn't this great?"

They were absolutely alone. The day was young yet. The lake, smooth and still as gray silk, widened to the west and south without so much as a wrinkle to roughen the surface. Only to the east, where the sun looked over a shoulder of a higher hill, it flamed up into a blinding diamond iridescence. The surrounding land lay between sky and water, hushed to a Sunday stillness. Far off across the lake by Richardson's they heard a dog bark, and the sound came fine and small and delicate. At long intervals the boat stirred with a gentle clap-clapping of the water along its sides. From the nearby shore in the growth of manzanita bushes quail called and clucked comfortably to each other; a bewildered yellow butterfly danced by over their heads, and slim blue dragon-flies came and poised on their lines and fishing-rods, bowing their backs.

From his seat in the bow, Condy cast a glance at Blix. She was holding her rod in both hands, absorbed, watchful, very intent. She was as trim as ever, even in the old clothes she had worn for the occasion. Her round, strong neck was as usual swathed high and tight in white, and the huge dog-collar girdled her waist according to her custom. She had taken off her hat. Her yellow hair rolled back from her round forehead and cool pink cheeks like a veritable nimbus, and for the fiftieth time Condy remarked the charming contrast of her small, deep-brown eyes in the midst of this white satin, yellow hair, white skin, and exquisite pink cheeks.

An hour passed. Then two.

"No fish," murmured Condy, drawing in his line to examine the bait. But, as he was fumbling with the flies he was startled by a sharp exclamation from Blix.

"Oh-Condy-I've-got-a-bite!"

He looked up just in time to see the tip of her rod twitch, twitch, twitch. Then the whole rod arched suddenly, the reel sang, the line tautened and cut diagonally through the water.

"You got him! you got him!" he shouted, palpitating with excitement. "And he's a good one!"

Blix rose, reeling in as rapidly as was possible, the butt of the twitching, living rod braced against her belt. All at once the rod straightened out again, the strain was released, and the line began to slant rapidly away from the boat.

"He's off!" she cried.

"Off, nothing! *He's going to jump.* Look out for him, now!"

And then the two watching from the boat, tense and quivering with the drama of the moment, saw that most inspiriting of sights —the "break" of a salmon-trout. Up he went, from a brusque explosion of ripples and foam—up into the gray of the morning from out the gray of the water: scales all gleaming, hackles all a-bristle; a sudden flash of silver, a sweep as of a scimitar in gray smoke, with a splash, a turmoil, an abrupt burst of troubled sound that stabbed through the silence of the morning, and in a single instant dissipated all the placid calm of the previous hours.

"Keep the line taut," whispered Condy, gritting his teeth. "When he comes toward you, reel him in; an' if he pulls too hard, give him his head."

Blix was breathing fast, her cheeks blazing, her eyes all alight.

"Oh," she gasped, "I'm so afraid I'll lose him! Oh, look at that!" she cried, as the trout darted straight for the bottom, bend-

ing the rod till the tip was submerged. "Condy, I'll lose him—I know I shall; you, *you* take the rod!"

"Not for a thousand dollars! Steady, there; he's away again! Oh, talk about *sport!*"

Yard by yard Blix reeled in until they began to see the silver glint of the trout's flanks through the green water. She brought him nearer. Swimming parallel with the boat, he was plainly visible from his wide-opened mouth—the hook and fly protruding from his lower jaw—to the red, quivering flanges of the tail. His sides were faintly speckled, his belly white as chalk. He was almost as long as Condy's forearm.

"Oh, he's a beauty! Oh, *isn't* he a beauty!" murmured Condy. "Now, careful, careful; bring him up to the boat where I can reach him; e-easy, Blix. If he bolts again, let him run."

Twice the trout shied from the boat's shadow, and twice, as Blix gave him his head, the reel sang and hummed like a watchman's rattle. But the third time he came to the surface and turned slowly on his side, the white belly and one red fin out of the water, the gills opening and shutting. He was tired out. A third time Blix drew him gently to the boat's side. Condy reached out and down into the water till his very shoulder was wet, hooked two fingers under the distended gills, and with a long, easy movement of the arm swung him into the boat.

Their exultation was that of veritable children. Condy whooped like an Apache, throwing his hat into the air; Blix was hardly articulate, her hands clasped, her hair in disarray, her eyes swimming with tears of sheer excitement. They shook each other's hands; they talked wildly at the same time; they pounded on the boat's thwarts with their fists; they laughed at their own absurdity; they looked at the trout again and again, guessed at his weight, and recalled to each other details of the struggle.

"When he broke that time, wasn't it grand?"

"And when I first felt him bite! It was so sudden—why, it actually frightened me. I never—no, never in my life!" exclaimed Blix, "was so happy as I am at this moment. Oh, Condy, to think—just to *think!*"

"Isn't it glory hallelujah?"

"Isn't it better than teas, and dancing, and functions?"

"Blix—how old are we?"

"I don't care how old we are; I think that trout will weigh two pounds."

When they were calm again, they returned to their fishing. The morning passed, and it was noon before they were aware of it. By half-past twelve Blix had caught three trout, though the first was by far the heaviest. Condy had not had so much as a bite. At one o'clock they rowed ashore and had lunch under a huge live-oak in a little amphitheatre of manzanita.

Never had a lunch tasted so delicious. What if the wine was warm and the stuffed olives oily? What if the pepper for the hard-boiled eggs had sifted all over the "devilish" ham sandwiches? What if the eggs themselves had not been sufficiently cooked, and the corkscrew forgotten? They *could* not be anything else but inordinately happy, sublimely gay. Nothing short of actual tragedy could have marred the joy of that day.

But after they were done eating, and Blix had put away the forks and spoons, and while Condy was stretched upon his back smoking a cigar, she said to him:

"Now, Condy, what do you say to a little game of cards with me?"

The cigar dropped from Condy's lips, and he sat suddenly upright, brushing the fallen leaves from his hair. Blix had taken a deck of cards from the lunch-basket, and four rolls of chips wrapped in tissue paper. He stared at her in speechless amazement.

"What do you say?" she repeated, looking at him and smiling.

"Why, Blix!" he exclaimed in amazement, "what do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I want you to play cards with me."

"I'll not to do it," he declared, almost coldly.

"Listen to me, Condy," answered Blix; and for quite five minutes, while he interrupted and protested and pshawed and argued, she talked to him calmly and quietly.

"I don't ask you to stop playing, Condy," she said, as she finished; "I just ask you that when you feel you must play—or—I mean, when you want to very bad, you will come and play with *me*, instead of playing at your club."

"But it's absurd, it's preposterous. I hate to see a girl gambling—and you of all girls!"

"It's no worse for me than it is for you and—well, do you suppose I would play with any one else? Maybe you think I can't play well enough to make it interesting for you," she said gayly. "Is that it? I can soon show you, Condy Rivers—never mind when I learned how."

"But, Blix, you don't know how often we play, those men and I. Why, it is almost every—you don't know how often we play."

"Condy, whenever you want to play, and will play with *me*, no matter what I've got in hand, I'll stop everything and play with you."

"But why?"

"Because I think, Condy, that *this* way perhaps you won't play quite so often at first; and then little by little perhaps—perhaps—well, never mind that now. *I* want to play; put it that way. But I want you to promise me never to play with any one else—say for six months."

And in the end, whipped by a sense of shame, Condy made her the promise. They became very gay upon the instant.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Condy; "what do *you* know of poker? I think we had best play old sledge or cassino."

Blix had dealt a hand and partitioned the chips.

"Straights and flushes *before* the draw," she announced calmly.

Condy started and stared; then, looking at her askance, picked up his hand.

"It's up to you."

"I'll make it five to play."

"Five? Very well. How many cards?"

"Three."

"I'll take two."

"Bet you five more."

Blix looked at her hand. Then, without trace of expression in her voice or face, said:

"There's your five, and I'll raise you five."

"Five better."

"And five better than that."

"Call you."

"Full house. Aces on tens," said Blix, throwing down her cards.

"Heavens! they're good as gold," muttered Condy as Blix gathered in the chips.

An hour later she had won all the chips but five.

"Now we'll stop and get to fishing again; don't you want to?"

He agreed, and she counted the chips.

"Condy, you owe me seven dollars and a half," she announced.

Condy began to smile. "Well," he said jocosely, "I'll send you around a check to-morrow."

But at this Blix was cross upon the instant. "You wouldn't do that—wouldn't talk that way with one of your friends at the club!" she exclaimed; "and it's not right to do it with me. Condy, give me

seven dollars and a half. When you play cards with me it's just as though it were with another man. I would have paid you if *you* had won."

"But I haven't got more than nine dollars. Who'll pay for the supper to-night at Luna's, and our railroad fare going home?"

"I'll pay."

"But I—I can't afford to lose money this way."

"Shouldn't have played, then. I took the same chances as you. Condy, I want my money."

"You—you—why you've regularly flimflammed me."

"Will you give me my money?"

"Oh, take your money then!"

Blix shut the money in her purse, and rose, dusting her dress.

"Now," she said—"now that the pastime of card-playing is over, we will return to the serious business of life, which is the catching—no, *'killing'* of lake trout."

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Condy pulled up the anchor of railroad iron and rowed back to Richardson's. Blix had six trout to her credit, but Condy's ill-luck had been actually ludicrous.

"I can hold a string in the water as long as anybody," he complained, "but I'd like to have the satisfaction of merely changing the bait *occasionally*. I've not had a single bite—not a nibble, y' know, all day. Never mind, you got the big trout, Blix; that first one. That five minutes was worth the whole day. It's been glorious, the whole thing. We'll come down here once a week right along now."

But the one incident that completed the happiness of that wonderful day occurred just as they were getting out of the boat on the shore by Richardson's. In a mud-hole between two rocks they discovered a tiny striped snake, hardly bigger than a lead pencil, in the act of swallowing a little green frog, and they passed a rapt ten minutes in witnessing the progress of this miniature drama, which culminated happily in the victim's escape, and triumph of virtue.

"That," declared Blix as they climbed into the old buggy which was to take them to the train, "was the one thing necessary. That made the day perfect."

They reached the city at dusk, and sent their fish, lunch-basket, and rods up to the Bessemers' flat by a messenger boy with an explanatory note for Blix's father.

"Now," said Condy, "for Luna's and the matrimonial objects."

VII

Luna's Mexican restaurant has no address. It is on no particular street, at no particular corner; even its habitués, its most enthusiastic devotees, are unable to locate it upon demand. It is "over there in the quarter," "not far from the cathedral there." One could find it if one started out with that intent; but to direct another there—no, that is out of the question. It *can* be reached by following the alleys of Chinatown. You will come out of the last alley—the one where the slave girls are—upon the edge of the Mexican quarter, and by going straight forward a block or two and by keeping a sharp lookout to right and left you will hit upon it. It is always to be searched for. Always to be discovered.

On that particular Monday evening Blix and Condy arrived at Luna's some fifteen minutes before seven. Condy had lost himself and all sense of direction in the strange streets of the quarter, and they were on the very brink of despair when Blix discovered the sign upon an opposite corner.

As Condy had foretold, they had the place to themselves. They went into the back room with its one mirror, six tables, and astonishing curtains of Nottingham lace; and the waiter, whose name was Richard or Riccardo, according to taste, began to officiate at the solemn rites of the "supper Mexican." Condy and Blix ate with their eyes continually wandering to the door; and as the *frijoles* were being served, started simultaneously and exchanged glances.

A man wearing two marguerites in the lapel of his coat had entered abruptly, and sat down to a table close at hand.

Condy drew a breath of suppressed excitement.

"There he is," he whispered—"Captain Jack!"

They looked at the newcomer with furtive anxiety, and told themselves that they were disappointed. For a retired sea captain he was desperately commonplace. His hair was red, he was younger than they had expected, and, worst of all, he did look tough.

"Oh, poor K. D. B.!" sighed Blix, shaking her head. "He'll never do, I'm afraid. Perhaps he has a good heart, though; red-headed people are *sometimes* affectionate."

"They are impulsive," hazarded Condy.

As he spoke the words, a second man entered the little room. He, too, sat down at a nearby table. He, too, ordered the "supper Mexican." He, too, wore marguerites in his buttonhole.

"Death and destruction!" gasped Condy, turning pale.

Blix collapsed helplessly in her chair, her hands dropping in her lap. They stared at each other in utter confusion.

"Here's a how-do-you-do," murmured Condy, pretending to strip a *tamale* that Richard had just set before him. But Blix had pushed hers aside.

"What does it mean?" whispered Condy across the table. "In Heaven's name, what does it mean?"

"It can only mean one thing," Blix declared; "one of them is the captain, and one is a coincidence. Anybody might wear a marguerite; we ought to have thought of that."

"But which is which?"

"If K. D. B. should come now!"

"But the last man looks more like the captain."

The last man was a sturdy, broad-shouldered fellow, who might have been forty. His heavy mustache was just touched with gray, and he did have a certain vaguely "sober and industrious" appearance. But the difference between the two men was slight, after all; the red-headed man could easily have been a sea captain, and he certainly was over thirty-five.

"Which? which? which?—how can we tell? We might think of some way to get rid of the coincidence, if we could only tell which the coincidence was. We owe it to K. D. B. In a way, Condy, it's our duty. We brought her here, or we are going to, and we ought to help her all we can; and she may be here at any moment. What time is it now?"

"Five minutes after seven. But, Blix, I should think the right one—the captain—would be all put out himself by seeing another chap here wearing marguerites. Does either one of 'em seem put out to you? Look. I should think the captain, whichever one he is, would kind of *glare* at the coincidence."

Stealthily they studied the two men for a moment.

"No, no," murmured Blix, "you can't tell. Neither of them seems to glare much. Oh, Condy"—her voice dropped to a faint whisper. "The red-headed one has put his hat on a chair, just behind him, notice? Do you suppose if you stood up you could see inside?"

"What good would that do?"

"He might have his initials inside the crown, or his whole name even; and you could see if he had a 'captain' before it."

Condy made a pretence of rising to get a match in a ribbed, truncated cone of china that stood upon an adjacent table, and Blix held her breath as he glanced down into the depths of the hat. He resumed his seat.

"Only initials," he breathed—"W. J. A. It might be Jack, that J., and it might be Joe, or Jeremiah, or Joshua; and even if he was a captain he might not use the title. We're no better off than we were before."

"And K. D. B. may come at any moment. Maybe she has come already and looked through the windows, and saw *two* men with marguerites and went away. She'd be just that timid. What can we do?"

"Wait a minute, look here," murmured Condy. "I've an idea. *I'll* find out which the captain is. You see that picture, that chromo, on the wall opposite?"

Blix looked as he indicated. The picture was a gorgeously colored lithograph of a pilot-boat, schooner-rigged, all sails set, dashing bravely through seas of emerald green color.

"You mean that schooner?" asked Blix.

"That schooner, exactly. Now, listen. You ask me in a loud voice what kind of a boat that is; and when I answer, you keep your eye on the two men."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"You'll see. Try it now; we've no time to lose."

Blix shifted in her seat and cleared her throat. Then:

"What a pretty boat that is up there, that picture on the wall. See over there, on the wall opposite? Do you notice it? Isn't she pretty? Condy, tell me what kind of a boat is that?"

Condy turned about in his place with great deliberation, fixed the picture with a judicial eye, and announced decisively:

"That?—why, that's a *barkentine*."

Condy had no need to wait for Blix's report. The demonstration came far too quickly for that. The red-headed man at his loud declaration merely glanced in the direction of the chromo and returned to his *enchellados*. But he of the black mustache followed Condy's glance, noted the picture of which he spoke, and snorted contemptuously. They even heard him mutter beneath his mustache:

"*Barkentine* your eye!"

"No doubt as to which is the captain now," whispered Condy so soon as the other had removed from him a glance of withering scorn.

They could hardly restrain their gayety; but their gravity promptly returned when Blix kicked Condy's foot under the table and murmured: "He's looking at his watch, the captain is. K. D. B. isn't here yet, and the red-headed man, the coincidence, is. We *must* get rid of him. Condy, can't you think of something?"

"Well, he won't go till he's through his supper, you can depend upon that. If he's here when K. D. B. arrives, it will spoil everything. She wouldn't stay a moment. She wouldn't even come in."

"Isn't it disappointing? And I had so counted upon bringing these two together! And Captain Jack *is* a nice man!"

"You can see that with one hand tied behind you," whispered Condy. "The other chap's tough."

"Looks just like the kind of man to get into jail sooner or later."

"Maybe he's into some mischief now; you never can tell. And the Mexican quarter of San Francisco is just the place for 'affairs.' I'll warrant he's got *pals.*"

"Well, here he is—that's the main point—just keeping those people apart, spoiling a whole romance. Maybe ruining their lives. It's *quite* possible; really it is. Just stop and think. This is a positive crisis we're looking at now."

"Can't we get rid of him *somehow?*"

"O-oh!" whispered Blix, all at once, in a quiver of excitement. "There *is* a way, if we'd ever have the courage to do it. It might work; and if it didn't, he'd never know the difference, never would suspect us. Oh! but we wouldn't dare."

"What? what? In Heaven's name what is it, Blix?"

"We wouldn't dare—we couldn't. Oh! but it would be such—"

"K. D. B. may come in that door at any second."

"I'm half afraid, but all the same— Condy, let me have a pencil." She dashed off a couple of lines on the back of the bill of fare, and her hand trembled like a leaf as she handed him what she had written.

"Send him—the red-headed man—that telegram. There's an office just two doors below here, next the drug-store. I saw it as we came by. You know his initials; remember, you saw them in his hat. W. J. A., Luna's restaurant. That's all you want."

"Lord," muttered Condy, as he gazed upon what Blix had written.

"Do you dare?" she whispered, with a little hysterical shudder.

"If it failed we've nothing to lose."

"And K. D. B. is coming nearer every instant!"

"But would he go—that is, at once?"

"We can only try. You won't be gone a hundred seconds. You can leave me here that length of time. Quick, Condy; decide one way or the other. It's getting desperate."

Condy reached for his hat.

"Give me some money, then," he said. "You won all of mine"

A few moments later he was back again. and the two sat, pretending to eat their chili peppers, their hearts in their throats, hardly daring to raise their eyes from their plates. Condy was actually sick with excitement, and all but tipped the seltzer bottle to the floor when a messenger boy appeared in the outer room. The boy and the proprietor held a conference over the counter. Then Richard appeared between the portières of Nottingham lace, the telegram in his hand and the boy at his heels.

Evidently Richard knew the red-headed man, for he crossed over to him at once with the words:

"I guess this is for you, Mr. Atkins?"

He handed him the despatch and retired. The red-headed man signed the receipt; the boy departed. Blix and Condy heard the sound of torn paper as the red-headed man opened the telegram.

Ten seconds passed, then fifteen, then twenty. There was a silence. Condy dared to steal a glance at the red-headed man's reflection in the mirror. He was studying the despatch, frowning horribly. He put it away in his pocket, took it out again with a fierce movement of impatience, and consulted it a second time. His "supper Mexican" remained untasted before him; Condy and Blix heard him breathing loud through his nose. That he was profoundly agitated, they could not doubt for a single moment. All at once a little panic terror seemed to take possession of him. He rose, seized his hat, jammed it over his ears, slapped a half-dollar upon the table, and strode from the restaurant.

This is what the read-headed man had read in the despatch; this is what Blix had written:

"All is discovered. Fly at once."

And never in all their subsequent rambles about the city did Blix or Condy set eyes upon the red-headed man again, nor did Luna's restaurant, where he seemed to have been a habitué, ever afterward know his presence. He disappeared; he was swallowed up. He had

left the restaurant, true. Had he also left that neighborhood? Had he fled the city, the State, the country even? What skeleton in the red-headed man's closet had those six words called to life and the light of day. Had they frightened him forth to spend the rest of his days fleeing from an unnamed, unknown avenger—a veritable wandering Jew? What mystery had they touched upon there in the bald, bare back room of the Quarter's restaurant? What dark door had they opened, what red-headed phantom had they evoked? Had they broken up a plot, thwarted a conspiracy, prevented a crime? They never knew. One thing only was certain. The red-headed man had had a past.

Meanwhile the minutes were passing, and K. D. B. still failed to appear. Captain Jack was visibly growing impatient, anxious. By now he had come to the fiery liqueur called *mescal*. He was nearly through his supper. At every moment he consulted his watch and fixed the outside door with a scowl. It was already twenty minutes after seven.

"I know the red-headed man spoiled it, after all," murmured Blix. "K. D. B. saw the two of them in here and was frightened."

"We could send Captain Jack a telegram from her," suggested Condy. "I'm ready for anything now."

"What could you say?"

"Oh, that she couldn't come. Make another appointment."

"He'd be offended with her. He'd never make another appointment. Sea captains are always so punctilious, y' know."

Richard brought them their coffee and kirsch, and Condy showed Blix how to burn a lump of sugar and sweeten the coffee with syrup. But they were disappointed. Captain Jack was getting ready to leave. K. D. B. had evidently broken the appointment.

Then all at once she appeared.

They knew it upon the instant by a brisk opening and shutting of the street door, and by a sudden alertness on the part of Captain Jack, which he immediately followed by a quite inexplicable move. The street door in the outside room had hardly closed before his hand shot to his coat lapel and tore out the two marguerites.

The action was instinctive; Blix knew it for such immediately. The retired captain had not premeditated it. He had not seen the face of the newcomer. She had not time to come into the back room, or even to close the street door. But the instant that the captain had recognized a bunch of white marguerites in her belt he had, without knowing why, been moved to conceal his identity.

"He's afraid," whispered Blix. "Positively, I believe he's afraid. How absolutely stupid men are!"

But meanwhile, K. D. B., the looked-for, the planned-for and intrigued-for; the object of so much diplomacy, such delicate manœuvring; the pivot upon which all plans were to turn, the storm-centre round which so many conflicting currents revolved, and for whose benefit the peace of mind of the red-headed man had been forever broken up—had entered the room.

"Why, she's *pretty!*" was Blix's first smothered exclamation, as if she had expected a harridan.

K. D. B. looked like a servant-girl of the better sort, and was really very neatly dressed. She was small, little even. She had snappy black eyes, a resolute mouth, and a general air of being very quiet, very matter-of-fact and complacent. She would be disturbed at nothing, excited at nothing; Blix was sure of that. She was placid, but it was the placidity not of the absence of emotion, but of emotion disdained. Not the placidity of the mollusk, but that of a mature and contemplative cat.

Quietly she sat down at a corner table, quietly she removed her veil and gloves, and quietly she took in the room and its three occupants.

Condy and Blix glued their eyes upon their coffee cups like guilty conspirators; but a crash of falling crockery called their attention to the captain's table.

Captain Jack was in a tremor. Hitherto he had acted the rôle of a sane and sensible gentleman of middle age, master of himself and of the situation. The entrance of K. D. B. had evidently reduced him to a semi-idiotic condition. He enlarged himself; he eased his neck in his collar with a rotary movement of head and shoulders. He frowned terribly at trifling objects in corners of the room. He cleared his throat till the glassware jingled. He pulled at his mustache. He perspired, fumed, fretted, and was suddenly seized with an insane desire to laugh. Once only he caught the eye of K. D. B., calmly sitting in her corner, picking daintily at her fish, whereupon he immediately overturned the vinegar and pepper casters upon the floor. Just so might have behaved an overgrown puppy in the presence of a sleepy, unperturbed chessy-cat, dozing by the fire.

"He ought to be shaken," murmured Blix at the end of her patience. "Does he think *she* is going to make the first move?"

"Ha, ah'm!" thundered the captain, clearing his throat for the

twentieth time, twirling his mustache, and burying his scarlet face in an enormous pocket handkerchief.

Five minutes passed and he was still in his place. From time to time K. D. B. fixed him with a quiet, deliberate look, and resumed her delicate picking.

"Do you think she knows it's he, now that he's taken off his marguerites?" whispered Condy.

"Know it?—of course she does! Do you think women are absolutely *blind*, or so imbecile as men are? And, then, if she didn't think it was he, she'd go away. And she's so really pretty, too. He ought to thank his stars alive. Think what a fright she might have been! She doesn't *look* thirty-one."

"Huh!" returned Condy. "As long as she *said* she was thirty-one, you can bet everything you have that she *is;* that's as true as revealed religion."

"Well, it's something to have seen the kind of people who write the personals," said Blix. "I had always imagined that they were kind of tough."

"You see they are not," he answered. "I told you they were not. Maybe, however, we have been exceptionally fortunate. At any rate, these are respectable enough."

"Not the least doubt about that. But why don't he do something, that captain?" mourned Blix. "Why *will* he act like such a ninny?"

"He's waiting for us to go," said Condy; "I'm sure of it. They'll never meet so long as we're here. Let's go and give 'em a chance. If you leave the two alone here, one or the other will *have* to speak. The suspense would become too terrible. It would be as though they were on a desert island."

"But I wanted to *see* them meet," she protested.

"You wouldn't hear what they said."

"But we'd never know if they did meet, and oh—and *who* spoke first?"

"She'll speak first," declared Condy.

"Never!" returned Blix, in an indignant whisper.

"I tell you what. We could go and then come back in five minutes. I'll forget my stick here. Savvy?"

"You would probably do it anyhow," she told him.

They decided this would be the better course. They got together their things, and Condy neglected his stick, hanging upon a hook on the wall.

At the counter in the outside room, Blix, to the stupefaction of Richard, the waiter, paid the bill. But as she was moving toward the door, Condy called her back.

"Remember the waiter," he said severely, while Richard grinned and bobbed. "Fifty cents is the very least you could tip him." Richard actually protested, but Condy was firm, and insisted upon a half-dollar tip.

"*Noblesse oblige*," he declared with vast solemnity.

They walked as far as the cathedral, listened for a moment to the bell striking the hour of eight; then as they remembered that the restaurant closed at that time, hurried back and entered the outside room in feigned perturbation.

"Did I, could I have possibly left my stick here?" exclaimed Condy to Richard, who was untying his apron behind the counter. But Richard had not noticed.

"I think I must have left it back here where we were sitting."

Condy stepped into the back room, Blix following. They got his stick and returned to the outside room.

"Yes, yes, I did leave it," he said, as he showed it to Richard. I'm always leaving that stick wherever I go."

"Come again," said Richard, as he bowed them out of the door.

On the curb outside Condy and Blix shook hands and congratulated each other on the success of all their labors. In the back room, seated at the same table, a bunch of wilting marguerites between them, they had seen their "matrimonial objects" conferring earnestly together, absorbed in the business of getting acquainted.

Blix heaved a great sigh of relief and satisfaction, exclaiming: "At last K. D. B. and Captain Jack have met!"

VIII

"But," she added, as they started to walk, "we will never know which one spoke first."

But Condy was already worrying.

"I don't know, I don't know," he murmured anxiously. "Perhaps we've done an awful thing. Suppose they aren't happy together after they're married? I wish we hadn't; I wish we hadn't now. We've been playing a game of checkers with human souls. We've an awful responsibility. Suppose he kills her some time?"

"Fiddlesticks, Condy! And, besides, if we've done wrong with

our matrimonial objects, we've offset it by doing well with our red-headed coincidence. How do you know, you may have 'foiled a villain' with that telegram—prevented a crime?"

Condy grinned at the recollection of the incident.

"'Fly at once,'" he repeated. "I guess he's flying yet. 'All is discovered.' I'd give a dollar and a half—"

"If you had it?"

"Oh, well, if I had it—to know just what it was we have discovered."

Suddenly Blix caught his arm.

"Condy, here they come!"

"Who? Who?"

"Our objects, Captain Jack and K. D. B."

"Of course, of course. They couldn't stay. The restaurant shuts up at eight."

Blix and Condy had been walking slowly in the direction of Pacific Street, and K. D. B. and her escort soon overtook them going in the same direction. As they passed, the captain was saying:

"—jumped on my hatches, and says we'll make it an international affair. That didn't—"

A passing wagon drowned the sound of his voice.

"He was telling her of his adventures!" cried Blix. "Splendid! Othello and Desdemona. They're getting on."

"Let's follow them!" exclaimed Condy.

"Should we? Wouldn't it be—indiscreet?"

"No. We are the arbiters of their fate; we *must* take an interest."

They allowed their objects to get ahead some half a block and then fell in behind. There was little danger of their being detected. The captain and K. D. B. were absorbed in each other. She had even taken his arm.

"They make a fine-looking couple, really," said Blix. "Where do you suppose they are going? To another restaurant?"

But this was not the case. Blix and Condy followed them as far as Washington Square, where the Geodetic Survey stone stands, and the enormous flagstaff; and there in front of a commonplace little house, two doors above the Russian church with its minarets like inverted balloons, K. D. B. and the captain halted. For a few moments they conversed in low tones at the gate, then said good-night, K. D. B. entering the house, the captain bowing with great

deference, his hat in his hand. Then he turned about, glanced once or twice at the house, set his hat at an angle, and disappeared across the square, whistling a tune, his chin in the air.

"Very good, excellent, highly respectable," approved Blix; and Condy himself fetched a sigh of relief.

"Yes, yes, it might have been worse."

"We'll never see them again, our 'Matrimonial Objects,'" said Blix, "and they'll never know about us; but we have brought them together. We've started a romance. Yes, I think we've done a good day's work. And now, Condy, I think we had best be thinking of home ourselves. I'm just beginning to get most awfully sleepy. What a day we've had!"

A sea fog, or rather *the* sea fog—San Francisco's old and inseparable companion—had gathered by the time they reached the top of the Washington Street hill. Everything was wet with it. The asphalt was like varnished ebony. Indistinct masses and huge dim shadows stood for the houses on either side. From the eucalyptus trees and the palms the water dripped like rain. Far off, oceanward, the fog-horn was lowing like a lost gigantic bull. The gray bulk of a policeman—the light from the street lamp reflected in his star—loomed up on the corner as they descended from the car.

. . . . . .

Condy had intended to call his diver's story "A Submarine Romance," but Blix had disapproved.

"It's too 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,'" she had said. "You want something much more dignified. There *is* that about you, Condy, you like to be too showy; you don't know when to stop. But you have left off red-and-white scarfs, and I am very glad to see you wearing white shirt-fronts instead of pink ones."

"Yes, yes, I thought it would be quieter," he had answered, as though the idea had come from him. Blix allowed him to think so.

But "A Victory Over Death," as the story was finally called, was a success. Condy was too much of a born story-teller not to know when he had done something distinctly good. When the story came back from the typewriter's, with the additional strength that print lends to fiction, and he had read it over, he could not repress a sense of jubilation. The story rang true.

"Bully, bully!" he muttered between his teeth as he finished the

last paragraph. "It's a corker! If it's rejected everywhere, it's an out-of-sight yarn just the same."

And there Condy's enthusiasm in the matter began to dwindle. The fine fire which had sustained him during the story's composition had died out. He was satisfied with his work. He had written a good story, and that was the end of it. No doubt he would send it East—to the Centennial Company—to-morrow or the day after—some time that week. To mail the manuscript meant quite half an hour's effort. He would have to buy stamps for return postage; a letter would have to be written, a large envelope procured, the accurate address ascertained. For the moment his supplement work demanded his attention. He put off sending the story from day to day. His interest in it had abated. And for that matter he soon discovered he had other things to think of.

It had been easy to promise Blix that he would no longer gamble at his club with the other men of his acquaintance; but it was "death and the devil," as he told himself, to abide by that promise. More than once in the fortnight following upon his resolution he had come up to the little flat on the Washington Street hill as to a place of refuge; and Blix, always pretending that it was all a huge joke and part of their good times, had brought out the cards and played with him. But she knew very well the fight he was making against the enemy, and how hard it was for him to keep from the round green tables and group of silent shirt-sleeved men in the card-rooms of his club. She looked forward to the time when Condy would cease to play even with her. But she was too sensible and practical a girl to expect him to break a habit of years' standing in a couple of weeks. The thing would have to be accomplished little by little. At times she had misgivings as to the honesty of the course she had adopted. But nowadays, playing as he did with her only, Condy gambled but two or three evenings in the week, and then not for more than two hours at a time. Heretofore hardly an evening that had not seen him at the round table in his club's card-room, whence he had not risen until long after midnight.

Condy had told young Sargeant that he had "reformed" in the matter of gambling, and intended to swear off for a few months. Sargeant, like the thoroughbred he was, never urged him to play after that, and never spoke of the previous night's game when Condy was about. The other men of his "set" were no less thoughtful, and, though they rallied him a little at first upon his defection, soon

let the matter drop. Condy told himself that there were plenty of good people in the world, after all. Every one seemed conspiring to make it easy for him, and he swore at himself for a weak-kneed cad.

On a certain Tuesday, about a week after the fishing excursion and the affair of the "Matrimonial Objects," toward half-past six in the evening, Condy was in his room, dressing for a dinner engagement. Young Sargeant's sister had invited him to be one of a party who were to dine at the University Club, and later on fill a box at a charity play, given by amateurs at one of the down-town theatres. But as he was washing his linen shirt-studs with his tooth-brush his eye fell upon a note, in Laurie Flagg's hand-writing, that lay on his writing-desk, and that he had received some ten days previous. Condy turned cold upon the instant, hurled the tooth-brush across the room, and dropped into a chair with a groan of despair. Miss Flagg was giving a theatre party for the same affair, and he remembered now that he had promised to join her party as well, forgetting all about the engagement he had made with Miss Sargeant. It was impossible at this late hour to accept either one of the young women's invitations without offending the other.

"Well, I won't go to *either,* that's all," he vociferated aloud to the opposite wall. "I'll send 'em each a wire, and say that I'm sick or have got to go down to the office, and—and, by George! I'll go up and see Blix, and we'll read and make things to eat."

And no sooner had this alternative occurred to him than it appeared too fascinating to be resisted. A weight seemed removed from his mind. When it came to that, what amusement would he have at either affair?

"Sit up there with your shirt-front starched like a board," he blustered, "and your collar throttling you, and smile till your face is sore, and reel off small talk to a girl whose last name you can't remember! Do I have any fun, does it do me any good, do I get ideas for yarns? What do I do it for? *I* don't know."

While speaking he had been kicking off his tight shoes and such of his full dress as he had already put on, and with a feeling of enormous relief turned again to his sack suit of tweed. "Lord, these feel better!" he exclaimed, as he substituted the loose business suit for the formal rigidity of his evening dress. It was with a sensation of positive luxury that he put on a "soft" shirt of blue cheviot and his tan walking-shoes.

"But no more red scarfs," he declared, as he knotted his black satin "club" before the mirror. "She *was* right there." He put his cigarettes in his pocket, caught up his gloves and stick, clapped on his hat, and started for the Bessemers' flat with a feeling of joyous expectancy he had not known for days.

Evidently Blix had seen him coming, for she opened the door herself; and it suited her humor for the moment to treat him as a peddler or book-agent.

"No, no," she said airily, her head in the air as she held the door. "No, we don't want any to-day. We *have* the biography of Abraham Lincoln. Don't want to subscribe to any Home Book of Art. We're not artistic; we use drapes in our parlors. Don't want 'The Wives and Mothers of Great Men.'"

But Condy had noticed a couple of young women on the lower steps of the adjacent flat, quite within ear-shot, and at once he began in a loud, harsh voice:

"Well, y' know, we can't wait for our rent forever; I'm only the collector, and I've nothing to do with repairs. Pay your rent that's three months overdue, and then—

But Blix pulled him within the house and clapped to the door.

"Condy *Rivers!*" she exclaimed, her cheeks flaming, "those are our neighbors. They heard every word. What *do* you suppose they think?"

"Huh! I'd rather have 'em think I was a rent-collector than a book-agent. *You* began it. 'Evenin', Miss Lady."

"'Evenin', Mister Man."

But Condy's visit, begun thus gayly, soon developed along much more serious lines. After supper, while the light still lasted, Blix read stories to him while he smoked cigarettes in the bay window of the dining-room. But as soon as the light began to go she put the book aside, and the two took their accustomed places in the window, and watched the evening burning itself out over the Golden Gate.

It was just warm enough to have one of the windows opened, and for a long time after the dusk they sat listening to the vague clamor of the city, lapsing by degrees, till it settled into a measured, soothing murmur, like the breathing of some vast monster asleep. Condy's cigarette was a mere red point in the half-darkness. The smoke drifted out of the open window in long, blue strata. At his elbow Blix was leaning forward, looking down upon the darkening, drowsing city, her round, strong chin propped upon her hand.

She was just close enough for Condy to catch the sweet, delicious feminine perfume that came indefinitely from her clothes, her hair, her neck. From where Condy sat he could see the silhouette of her head and shoulders against the dull golden blur of the open window; her round, high forehead, with the thick yellow hair rolling back from her temples and ears, her pink, clean cheeks, her little dark-brown, scintillating eyes, and her firm red mouth, made all the firmer by the position of her chin upon her hand. As ever, her round, strong neck was swathed high and tight in white satin; but between the topmost fold of the satin and the rose of one small ear-lobe was a little triangle of white skin, that was partly her neck and partly her cheek, and that Condy knew should be softer than down, smoother than satin, warm and sweet and redolent as new apples. Condy imagined himself having the right to lean toward her there and kiss that little spot upon her neck or her cheek; and as he fancied it, was surprised to find his breath come suddenly quick, and a barely perceptible qualm, as of a certain faintness, thrill him to his finger-tips; and then, he thought, how would it be if he could, without fear of rebuff, reach out his arm and put it about her trim, firm waist, and draw her very close to him, till he should feel the satiny coolness of her smooth cheek against his; till he could sink his face in the delicious, fragrant confusion of her hair, then turn that face to his—that face with its strong, calm mouth and sweet, full lips—the face of this dear young girl of nineteen, and then—

"I say—I—shall we—let's read again. Let's—let's do something."

"Condy, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Blix, with a great start. "No, listen: I want to talk to you, to tell you something. Papum and I have been having some very long and serious talks since you were last here. What do you think, I may go away."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Condy, sitting suddenly upright. "Where to, in Heaven's name?" he added—"and when? and what for?"

"To New York, to study medicine."

There was a silence; then Condy exclaimed, waving his hands at her:

"Oh, go right on! Don't mind me. Little thing like going to New York—to study medicine. Of course, that happens every day, a mere detail. I presume you'll go back and forth for your meals?"

Then Blix began to explain. It appeared that she had two aunts, both sisters of her father—one a widow, the other unmarried. The widow, a certain Mrs. Kihm, lived in New York, and was wealthy, and had views on "women's sphere of usefulness." The other, Miss Bessemer, a little old maid of fifty, Condy had on rare occasions seen at the flat, where every one called her Aunt Dodd. She lived in that vague region of the city known as the Mission, where she owned a little property.

From what Blix told him that evening, Condy learned that Mrs. Kihm had visited the coast a few winters previous and had taken a great fancy to Blix. Even then she had proposed to Mr. Bessemer to take Blix back to New York with her, and educate her to some woman's profession; but at that time the old man would not listen to it. Now it seemed that the opportunity had again presented itself.

"She's a dear old lady," Blix said; "not a bit strong-minded, as you would think, and ever so much cleverer than most men. She manages all her property herself. For the last month she's been writing again to Papum for me to come on and stay with her three or four years. She hasn't a chick nor a child, and she don't entertain or go out any, so maybe she feels lonesome. Of course if I studied there, Papum wouldn't think of Aunt Kihm—don't you know—paying for it all. I wouldn't go if it was that way. But I could stay with her and she could make a home for me while I was there—if I should study—anything—study medicine."

"But why!" he exclaimed. "What do you want to study to be a doctor for? It isn't as though you had to support yourself."

"I know, I know I've not got to support myself. But why shouldn't I have a profession just like a man—just like you, Condy? You stop and think. It seemed strange to me when I first thought of it; but I got thinking about it and talking it over with Papum, and I should *love* it. I'd do it, not because I would have to do it, but because it would interest me. Condy, you know that I'm not a bit strong-minded, and that I hate a masculine, unfeminine girl as much as you do."

"But a medical college, Blix! You don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I do. There's a college in New York just for women. Aunt Kihm sent me the prospectus, and it's one of the best in the country. I don't dream of practicing, you know; at least, I don't think about that now. But one must have some occupation;

and isn't studying medicine, Condy, better than piano-playing, or French courses, or literary classes and Browning circles? Oh, I've no patience with that kind of girl! And look at the chance I have now; and Aunt Kihm is such a dear! Think, she writes, I could go to and from the college in her coupé every day, and I would see New York; and just being in a big city like that is an education."

"You're right, it would be a big thing for you," assented Condy, "and I like the idea of *you* studying something. It would be the making of such a girl as you, Blix."

And then Blix, seeing him thus acquiescent, said:

"Well, it's all settled; Papum and I both wrote last night."

"When are you going?"

"The first week in January."

"Well, that's not so *awfully* soon. But who will take your place here? However in the world would your father get along without you—and Snooky and Howard?"

"Aunt Dodd is going to come."

"Sudden enough," said Condy, "but it *is* a great thing for you, Blix, and I'm mighty glad for you. Your future is all cut out for you now. Of course your aunt, if she's so fond of you and hasn't any children, will leave you everything—maybe settle something on you right away; and you'll marry some one of those New York chaps, and be great big people before you know it."

"The idea, Condy!" she protested. "No; I'm going there to study medicine. Oh, you don't know how enthusiastic I am over the idea! I've bought some of the first-year books already, and have been reading them. Really, Condy, they are even better than 'Many Inventions.'"

"Wish *I* could get East," muttered Condy gloomily. Blix forgot her own good fortune upon the instant.

"I do so wish you *could*, Condy!" she exclaimed. "You are too good for a Sunday supplement. *I* know it and *you* know it, and I've heard ever so many people who have read your stories say the same thing. You could spend twenty years working as you are now, and at the end what would you be? Just an assistant editor of a Sunday supplement, and still in the same place; and worse, you'd come to be contented with that, and think you were only good for that and nothing better. You've got it in you, Condy, to be a great story-teller. I believe in you, and I've every confidence in you. But just so long as you stay here and are willing to do hack work, just so long you will be a hack writer. You *must* break from

it; you *must* get away. I know you have a good time here; but there are so many things better than that and more worth while. You ought to make up your mind to get East, and work for that and nothing else. I know you want to go, but wanting isn't enough. Enthusiasm without energy isn't enough. You have enthusiasm, Condy; but you *must* have energy. You must be willing to give up things; you must make up your mind that you will go East, and then set your teeth together and do it. Oh, I *love* a man that can do that—make up his mind to a thing and then put it through!"

Condy watched her as she talked, her brown-black eyes coruscating, her cheeks glowing, her small hands curled into round pink fists.

"Blix, you're splendid!" he exclaimed; "you're fine! You could put life into a dead man. You're the kind of girl that are the making of men. By Jove, you'd back a man up, wouldn't you? You'd stand by him till the last ditch. Of course," he went on after a pause—"of course I ought to go to New York. But, Blix, suppose I went—well, then what? It isn't as though I had any income of my own, or rich aunt. Suppose I didn't find something to do—and the chances are that I wouldn't for three or four months—what would I live on in the meanwhile? 'What would the robin do then, poor thing?' I'm a poor young man, Miss Bessemer, and I've got to eat. No; my only chance is 'to be discovered' by a magazine or a publishing house or somebody, and get a bid of some kind."

"Well, there is the Centennial Company. They have taken an interest in you, Condy. You must follow that right up and keep your name before them all the time. Have you sent them 'A Victory Over Death' yet?"

Condy sat down to his eggs and coffee the next morning in the hotel, harried with a certain sense of depression and disappointment for which he could assign no cause. Nothing seemed to interest him. The newspaper was dull. He could look forward to no pleasure in his day's work; and what was the matter with the sun that morning? As he walked down to the office he noted no cloud in the sky, but the brightness was gone from the day. He sat down to his desk and attacked his work, but "copy" would not come. The sporting editor and his inane jokes harassed him beyond expression. Just the sight of the clipping editor's back was an irritation. The office boy was a mere incentive to profanity. There was no spring in Condy that morning, no elasticity, none of his natural buoyancy. As the day wore on, his ennui increased; his luncheon at the club

was tasteless, tobacco had lost its charm. He ordered a cocktail in the wine-room, and put it aside with a wry face.

The afternoon was one long tedium. At every hour he flung his pencil down, utterly unable to formulate the next sentence of his article, and, his hands in his pockets, gazed gloomily out of the window over the wilderness of roofs—grimy, dirty, ugly roofs that spread out below. He craved diversion, amusement, excitement. Something there was that he wanted with all his heart and soul; yet he was quite unable to say what it was. Something was gone from him to-day that he had possessed yesterday, and he knew he would not regain it on the morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that. What was it? He could not say. For half an hour he imagined he was going to be sick. His mother was not to be at home that evening, and Condy dined at his club in the hopes of finding some one with whom he could go to the theatre later on in the evening. Sargeant joined him over his coffee and cigarette, but declined to go with him to the theatre.

"Another game on to-night?" asked Condy.

"I suppose so," admitted the other.

"I guess I'll join you to-night," said Condy. "I've had the blue devils since morning, and I've got to have something to drive them off."

"Don't let me urge you, you know," returned Sargeant.

"Oh, that's all right!" Condy assured him. "My time's about up, anyways."

An hour later, just as he, Sargeant, and the other men of their "set" were in the act of going upstairs to the card-rooms, a hall-boy gave Condy a note, at that moment brought by a messenger, who was waiting for an answer. It was from Blix. She wrote:

"Don't you want to come up and play cards with me to-night? We haven't had a game in over a week?"

"How did she know?" thought Condy to himself—"how could she tell?" Aloud, he said:

"I can't join you fellows, after all. 'Despatch from the managing editor.' Some special detail or other."

For the first time since the previous evening Condy felt his spirits rise as he set off toward the Washington Street hill. But though he and Blix spent as merry an evening as they remembered in a long time, his nameless, formless irritation returned upon him almost as soon as he had bidden her good-night. It stayed with

him all through the week, and told upon his work. As a result, three of his articles were thrown out by the editor.

"We can't run such rot as that in the paper," the chief had said. "Can't you give us a story?"

"Oh, I've got a kind of a yarn you can run if you like," answered Condy, his week's depression at its very lowest.

"A Victory Over Death" was published in the following Sunday's supplement of the "Times," with illustrations by one of the staff artists. It attracted not the least attention.

Just before he went to bed the Sunday evening of its appearance, Condy read it over again for the last time.

"It's a rotten failure," he muttered gloomily as he cast the paper from him. "Simple drivel. I wonder what Blix will think of it. I wonder if I amount to a hill of beans. I wonder *what* she wants to go East for, anyway."

IX

The old-fashioned Union Street cable car, with its low, comfortable outside seats, put Blix and Condy down just inside the Presidio Government Reservation. Condy asked a direction of a sentry nursing his Krag-Jörgensen at the terminus of the track, and then with Blix set off down the long board walk through the tunnel of overhanging evergreens.

The day could not have been more desirable. It was a little after ten of a Monday morning, Condy's weekly holiday. The air was neither cool nor warm, effervescent merely, brisk and full of the smell of grass and of the sea. The sky was a speckless sheen of pale blue. To their right, and not far off, was the bay, blue as indigo. Alcatraz seemed close at hand; beyond was the enormous green, red, and purple pyramid of Tamalpais climbing out of the water, head and shoulders above the little foothills, and looking out to the sea and to the west.

The Reservation itself was delightful. There were rows of the officers' houses, all alike, drawn up in lines like an assembly of the staff; there were huge barracks, most like college dormitories; and on their porches enlisted men in shirt sleeves and overalls were cleaning saddles, and polishing the brass of head-stalls and bridles, whistling the while or smoking corn-cob pipes. Here on the parade-ground a soldier, his coat and vest removed, was batting

grounders and flies to a half-dozen of his fellows. Over by the stables, strings of horses, all of the same color, were being curried and cleaned. A young lieutenant upon a bicycle spun silently past. An officer came from his front gate, his coat unbuttoned and a briar in his teeth. The walks and roads were flanked with lines of black-painted cannon-balls; inverted pieces of abandoned ordnance stood at corners. From a distance came the mellow snarling of a bugle.

Blix and Condy had planned a long walk for that day. They were to go out through the Presidio Reservation, past the barracks and officers' quarters, and on to the old fort at the Golden Gate. Here they would turn and follow the shore-line for a way, then strike inland across the hills for a short half-mile, and regain the city and the street-car lines by way of the golf-links. Condy had insisted upon wearing his bicycle outfit for the occasion, and, moreover, carried a little satchel, which, he said, contained a pair of shoes.

But Blix was as sweet as a rose that morning, all in tailor-made black but for the inevitable bands of white satin wrapped high and tight about her neck. The St. Bernard dog-collar did duty as a belt. She had disdained a veil, and her yellow hair was already blowing about her smooth pink cheeks. She walked at his side, her step as firm and solid as his own, her round, strong arms swinging, her little brown eyes shining with good spirits and vigor, and the pure, clean animal joy of being alive on that fine cool Western morning. She talked almost incessantly. She was positively garrulous. She talked about the fine day that it was, about the queer new forage caps of the soldiers, about the bare green hills of the Reservation, about the little cemetery they passed just beyond the limits of the barracks, about a rabbit she saw, and about the quail they both heard whistling and calling in the hollows under the bushes.

Condy walked at her side in silence, yet no less happy than she, smoking his pipe and casting occasional glances at a great ship—a four-master that was being towed out toward the Golden Gate. At every moment and at every turn they noted things that interested them, and to which they called each other's attention.

"Look, Blix!"

"Oh, Condy, look at that!"

They were soon out of the miniature city of the Post, and held on down through the low reach of *tules* and sand-dunes that stretch between the barracks and the old red fort.

"Look, Condy!" said Blix. "What's that building down there on the shore of the bay—the one with the flagstaff?"

"I think that must be the lifeboat station."

"I wonder if we could go down and visit it. I think it would be good fun."

"Idea!" exclaimed Condy.

The station was close at hand. To reach it they had but to leave the crazy board walk that led on toward the fort, and cross a few hundred yards of sand-dune. Condy opened the gate that broke the line of evergreen hedge around the little two-story house, and promptly unchained a veritable pandemonium of dogs.

Inside, the place was not without a certain charm of its own. A brick wall, bordered with shells, led to the front of the station, which gave directly upon the bay; a little well-kept lawn opened to right and left, and six or eight gaily-painted old rowboats were set about, half filled with loam in which fuchsias, geraniums, and mignonettes were flowering. A cat or two dozed upon the window-sills in the sun. Upon a sort of porch overhead, two of the crew paced up and down in a manner that at once suggested the poop. Here and there was a gleam of highly polished red copper or brass trimmings. The bay was within two steps of the front door, while a little further down the beach was the house where the surf-boat was kept, and the long runway leading down from it to the water. Condy rapped loudly at the front door. It was opened by Captain Jack.

Captain Jack, and no other; only now he wore a blue sweater and a leather-visored cap, with the letters U. S. L. B. S. around the band.

Not an instant was given them for preparation. The thing had happened with the abruptness of a transformation scene at a theatre. Condy's knock had evoked a situation. Speech was stricken from their mouths. For a moment they were bereft even of action, and stood there on the threshold, staring open-mouthed and open-eyed at the sudden reappearance of their "matrimonial object." Condy was literally dumb; in the end it was Blix who tided them over the crisis.

"We were just going by—just taking a walk," she explained, "and we thought we'd like to see the station. Is it all right? Can we look around?"

"Why, of course," assented the Captain with great cordiality. "Come right in. This is visitors' day. You just happened to hit it—only it's mighty few visitors we ever have," he added.

While Condy was registering for himself and Blix, they managed to exchange a lightning glance. It was evident the Captain did not recognize them. The situation readjusted itself, even promised to be of extraordinary interest. And for that matter it made little difference whether the captain remembered them or not.

"No, we don't get many visitors," the Captain went on, as he led them out of the station and down the small gravel walk to the house where the surf-boat was kept. "This is a quiet station. People don't fetch out this way very often, and we're not called out very often, either. We're an inside post, you see, and usually we don't get a call unless the sea's so high that the Cliff House station can't launch their boat. So, you see, we don't go out much, but when we *do,* it means business with a great big B. Now, this here, you see," continued the Captain, rolling back the sliding doors of the house, "is the surf-boat. By the way, let's see; I ain't just caught your names yet."

"Well, my name's Rivers," said Condy, "and this is Miss Bessemer. We're both from the city."

"Happy to know you, sir; happy to know you, miss," he returned, pulling off his cap. "My name's Hoskins, but you can just call me Captain Jack. I'm so used to it that I don't kind of answer to the other. Well, now, Miss Bessemer, this here's the surf-boat; she's self-rightin', self-bailin', she can't capsize, and if I was to tell you how many thousands of dollars she cost, you wouldn't believe me."

Condy and Blix spent a delightful half-hour in the boat-house while Captain Jack explained and illustrated, and told them anecdotes of wrecks, escapes, and rescues till they held their breaths like ten-year-olds.

It did not take Condy long to know that he had discovered what the story-teller so often tells of but so seldom finds, and what, for want of a better name, he elects to call "a character."

Captain Jack had been everywhere, had seen everything, and had done most of the things worth doing, including a great many things that he had far better have left undone. But on this latter point the Captain seemed to be innocently and completely devoid of a moral sense of right and wrong. It was quite evident that he saw no matter for conscience in the smuggling of Chinamen across the Canadian border at thirty dollars a head—a venture in which he had had the assistance of the prodigal son of an American divine of international renown. The trade to Peruvian insurgents of condemned rifles was to be regretted only because the ring manipulating

it was broken up. The appropriation of a schooner in the harbor of Callao was a story in itself; while the robbery of thirty thousand dollars' worth of sea-otter skins from a Russian trading-post in Alaska, accomplished chiefly through the agency of a barrel of rum manufactured from sugar-cane, was a veritable achievement.

He had been born, so he told them, in Winchester, in England, and—Heaven save the mark!—had been brought up with a view of taking orders. For some time he was a choir boy in the great Winchester Cathedral; then, while yet a lad, had gone to sea. He had been boat-steerer on a New Bedford whaler, and struck his first whale when only sixteen. He had filibustered down to Chili; had acted as ice pilot on an Arctic relief expedition; had captained a crew of Chinamen shark-fishing in Magdalena Bay, and had been nearly murdered by his men; had been a deep-sea diver, and had burst his ear-drums at the business, so that now he could blow tobacco smoke out of his ears; he had been shipwrecked in the Gilberts, fought with the Seris on the lower California Islands, sold champagne—made from rock candy, effervescent salts, and Reisling wine—to the Coreans, had dreamed of "holding up" a Cunard liner, and had ridden on the Strand in a hansom with William Ewart Gladstone. But the one thing of which he was proud, the one picture of his life he most delighted to recall, was himself as manager of a negro minstrel troupe, in a hired drum-major's uniform, marching down the streets of Sacramento at the head of the brass band in burnt cork and regimentals.

"The star of the troupe," he told them, "was the lady with the iron jore. We busted in Stockton, and she gave me her diamonds to pawn. I pawned 'em, and kept back something in the hand for myself and hooked it to San Francisco. Strike me straight if she didn't follow me, that iron-jored piece; met me one day in front of the Bush Street Theatre, and horsewhipped me properly. Now, just think of that"—and he laughed as though it was the best kind of a joke.

"But," hazarded Blix, "don't you find it rather dull out here—lonesome? I should think you would want to have some one with you to keep you company—to—to do your cooking for you?"

But Condy, ignoring her diplomacy and thinking only of possible stories, blundered off upon another track.

"Yes," he said, "you've led such a life of action, I should think this station would be pretty dull for you. How did you happen to choose it?"

"Well, you see," answered the Captain, leaning against the smooth white flank of the surf-boat, his hands in his pockets, "I'm lying low just now. I got into a scrape down at Libertad, in Mexico, that made talk, and I'm waiting for that to die down some. You see, it was this way."

Mindful of their experience with the mate of the whaleback, Condy and Blix were all attention in an instant. Blix sat down upon an upturned box, her elbows on her knees, leaning forward, her little eyes fixed and shining with interest and expectation; Condy, the story-teller all alive and vibrant in him, stood at her elbow, smoking cigarette after cigarette, his fingers dancing with excitement and animation as the Captain spoke.

And then it was that Condy and Blix, in that isolated station, the bay lapping at the shore within ear-shot, in that atmosphere redolent of paint and oakum and of seaweed decaying upon the beach outside, first heard the story of "In Defiance of Authority."

Captain Jack began it with his experience as a restaurant keeper during the boom days in Seattle, Washington. He told them how he was the cashier of a dining-saloon whose daily net profits exceeded eight hundred dollars; how its proprietor suddenly died, and how he, Captain Jack, continued the management of the restaurant pending a settlement of the proprietor's affairs and an appearance of heirs; how in the confusion and excitement of the boom no settlement was ever made; and how, no heirs appearing, he assumed charge of the establishment himself, paying bills, making contracts, and signing notes, until he came to consider the business and all its enormous profits as his own; and how at last, when the restaurant was burned, he found himself some forty thousand dollars "ahead of the game."

Then he told them of the strange club of the place, called "The Exiles," made up chiefly of "younger sons" of English and British-Canadian families, every member possessed of a "past" more or less disreputable; men who had left their country for their country's good, and for their family's peace of mind—adventurers, wanderers, soldiers of fortune, gentlemen-vagabonds, men of hyphenated names and even noble birth, whose appellations were avowedly aliases. He told them of his meeting with Billy Isham, one of the club's directors, and of the happy-go-lucky, reckless, unpractical character of the man; of their acquaintance, intimacy, and subsequent partnership; of how the filibustering project was started with Captain Jack's forty thousand, and the never-to-be-forgotten interview in San Francisco with Señora Estrada, the agent of the insurgents; of

the incident of her calling-card—how she tore it in two and gave one-half to Isham; of their outfitting, and the broken sextant that was to cause their ultimate discomfiture and disaster, and of the voyage to the rendezvous on a Panama liner.

"Strike me!" continued Captain Jack, "you should have seen Billy Isham on that Panama dough-dish; a passenger ship she was, and Billy was the life of her from stem to stern-post. There was a church pulpit aboard that they were taking down to Mazatlan for some chapel or other, and this here pulpit was lashed on deck aft. Well, Billy had been most kinds of a fool in his life, and among others a play-actor; called himself Gaston Maundeville, and was clean daft on his knowledge of Shakespeare and his own power of interpretin' the hidden meanin' of the lines. I ain't never going to forgit the day he gave us Portia's speech. We were just under the tropic, and the day was a scorcher. There was mostly men folk aboard, and we lay around the deck in our pajamas, while Billy—Gaston Maundeville, dressed in striped red and white pajamas—clum up in that bally pulpit, with the ship's Shakespeare in his hands, an' let us have—'The quality o' mercy isn't strained; it droppeth as the genteel dew from heavun.' Laugh, I tell you I was sore with it. Lord, how we guyed him! An' the more we guyed and the more we laughed, the more serious he got and the madder he grew. He said he was interpretin' the hidden meanin' of the lines."

And so the Captain ran through that wild, fiery tale—of fighting and loving, buccaneering and conspiring; mandolins tinkling, knives clicking; oaths mingling with sonnets, and spilled wine with spilled blood. He told them of Isham's knife duel with the Mexican lieutenant, their left wrists lashed together; of the "battle of the thirty" in the pitch dark of the Custom House cellar; of Señora Estrada's love for Isham; and all the roll and plunge of action that make up the story of "In Defiance of Authority."

At the end, Blix's little eyes were snapping like sparks; Condy's face was flaming, his hands were cold, and he was shifting his weight from foot to foot, like an excited thoroughbred horse.

"Heavens and earth, what a yarn!" he exclaimed almost in a whisper.

Blix drew a long, tremulous breath and sat back upon the upturned box, looking around her as though she had but that moment been awakened.

"Yes, sir," said the Captain, rolling a cigarette. "Yes, sir, those were great days. Get down there around the line in those little,

out-o'-the-way republics along the South American coast, and things happen to you. You hold a man's life in the crook of your forefinger, an' nothing's done by halves. If you hate a man, you lay awake nights biting your mattress, just thinking how you hate him; an' if you love a woman—good Lord, how you do *love* her!"

"But—but!" exclaimed Condy, "I don't see how you can want to do anything else. Why, you're living sixty to the minute when you're playing a game like that!"

"Oh, I ain't dead yet!" answered the Captain. "I got a few schemes left that I could get fun out of."

"How can you wait a minute!" exclaimed Blix breathlessly. "Why don't you get a ship right away—to-morrow—and go right off on some other adventure?"

"Well, I can't just now," returned the Captain, blowing the smoke from his cigarette through his ears. "There's a good many reasons; one of 'em is that I've just been married."

X

"MUM—MAR—MARRIED!" gasped Condy, swallowing something in his throat.

Blix rose to her feet.

"Just been *married!*" she repeated, a little frightened. "Why—why—why; how *delightful!*"

"Yes—yes," mumbled Condy. "How delightful. I congratulate you!"

"Come in—come back to the station," said the Captain jovially, "and I'll introduce you to m' wife. We were married only last Sunday."

"Why, yes—yes, of course, we'd be delighted," vociferated the two conspirators a little hysterically.

"She's a mighty fine little woman," declared the Captain, as he rolled the door of the boat-house to its place and preceded them up the gravel walk to the station.

"Of course she is," responded Blix. Behind Captain Jack's back she fixed Condy with a wide-eyed look, and nudged him fiercely with an elbow to recall him to himself; for Condy's wits were scattered like a flock of terrified birds, and he was gazing blankly at the Captain's coat collar with a vacant, maniacal smile.

"For Heaven's sake, Condy!" she had time to whisper before they arrived in the hallway of the station.

But fortunately they were allowed a minute or so to recover themselves and prepare for what was coming. Captain Jack ushered them into what was either the parlor, office, or sitting-room of the station, and left them with the words:

"Just make yourselves comfortable here, an' I'll go fetch the little woman."

No sooner had he gone than the two turned to each other.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"We're in for it now."

"But we must see it through, Condy; act just as natural as you can, and we're all right."

"But supposing *she* recognizes us!"

"Supposing she does—what then. How *are* they to know that we wrote the letters?"

"Sh, Blix, not so loud! They know by now that *they* didn't."

"But it seems that it hasn't made any difference to them; they are married. And besides, they wouldn't speak about putting 'personals' in the paper to us. They would never let anybody know that."

"Do you suppose they could possibly suspect?"

"I'm sure they couldn't."

"Here they come."

"Keep perfectly calm, and we're saved."

"Suppose it isn't K. D. B., after all?"

But it was, of course, and she recognized them in an instant. She and the Captain—the latter all grins—came in from the direction of the kitchen, K. D. B. wearing a neat blue calico gown and an apron that was really a marvel of cleanliness and starch.

"Kitty!" exclaimed Captain Jack, seized again with an unexplainable mirth, "here's some young folks come out to see the place, an' I want you to know 'em. Mr. Rivers, this is m' wife, Kitty, and—lessee, miss, I don't rightly remember your name."

"Bessemer!" exclaimed Condy and Blix in a breath.

"Oh!" exclaimed K. D. B., "you were in the restaurant the night that the Captain and I—I—that is—yes, I'm quite sure I've seen you before." She turned from one to the other, beginning to blush furiously.

"Yes, yes, in Luna's restaurant, wasn't it?" said Condy desperately. "It seems to me I do just barely remember."

"And wasn't the Captain there?" Blix ventured.

"I forgot my stick, I remember," continued Condy. "I came back for it; and just as I was going out it seems to me I saw you two at a table near the door."

He thought it best to allow their "matrimonial objects" to believe he had not seen them before.

"Yes, yes, we were there," answered K. D. B. tactfully. "We dine there almost every Monday night."

Blix guessed that K. D. B. would prefer to have the real facts of the situation ignored, and determined she should have the chance to change the conversation if she wished.

"What a delicious supper one has there!" she said.

"Can't say I like Mexican cooking myself," answered K. D. B., forgetting that they dined there every Monday night. "Plain United States is good enough for me."

Suddenly Captain Jack turned abruptly to Condy, exclaiming: "Oh, *you* was the chap that called the picture of that schooner a barkentine."

"Yes; *wasn't* that a barkentine?" he answered innocently.

"Barkentine your *eye!*" spluttered the Captain. "Why, that was a schooner as plain as a pie plate."

But ten minutes later the ordeal was over, and Blix and Condy, once more breathing easily, were on their walk again. The Captain and K. D. B. had even accompanied them to the gate of the station, and had strenuously urged them to "come in and see them again the next time they were out that way."

"Married!" murmured Condy, putting both hands to his head. "We've done it, we've done it now."

"Well, what of it?" declared Blix, a little defiantly. "I think it's all right. You can see the Captain is in love with her, and she with him. No, we've nothing to reproach ourselves with."

"But—but—but so sudden!" whispered Condy, all aghast. "That's what makes me faint—the suddenness of it."

"It shows how much they are in love, how—how readily they—adapted themselves to each other. No, it's all right."

"They seemed to like us—actually."

"Well, they had better—if they knew the truth. Without us they never would have met."

"They both asked us to come out and see them again, did you notice that? Let's do it, Blix," Condy suddenly exclaimed; "let's get to know them!"

"Of course we must. Wouldn't it be fun to call on them—to get regularly acquainted with them!"

"They might ask us to dinner some time."

"And think of the stories he could tell you!"

They enthused immediately upon this subject, both talking excitedly at the same time, going over the details of the Captain's yarns, recalling the incidents to each other.

"Fancy!" exclaimed Condy—"fancy Billy Isham in his pajamas, red and white stripes, reading Shakespeare from that pulpit on board the ship, and the other men guying him! Isn't that a *scene* for you? Can't you just *see* it?"

"I wonder if the Captain wasn't making all those things up as he went along. He don't seem to have any sense of right and wrong at all. He might have been lying, Condy."

"What difference would that make?"

And so they went along in that fine, clear, Western morning, on the edge of the Continent, both of them young and strong and vigorous, the Pacific under their eyes, the great clean Trades blowing in their faces, the smell of the salt sea coming in long aromatic whiffs to their nostrils. Young and strong and fresh, their imaginations thronging with pictures of vigorous action and adventure, buccaneering, filibustering, and all the swing, the leap, the rush and gallop, the exuberant, strong life of the great, uncharted world of Romance.

And all unknowingly they were a Romance in themselves. Cynicism, old age, and the weariness of all things done had no place in the world in which they walked. They still had their illusions, all the keenness of their sensations, all the vividness of their impressions. The simple things of the world, the great, broad, primal emotions of the race stirred in them. As they swung along, going toward the ocean, their brains were almost as empty of thought or of reflection as those of two fine, clean animals. They were all for the immediate sensation; they did not think—they *felt*. The intellect was dormant; they looked at things, they heard things, they smelled the smell of the sea, and of the seaweed, of the fat, rank growth of cresses in the salt marshes; they turned their cheeks to the passing wind, and filled their mouths and breasts with it. Their life was sweet to them; every hour was one glad effervescence. The fact that the ocean was blue was a matter for rejoicing. It was good to be alive on that royal morning. Just to be young was an exhilaration; and everything was young with them—the day

was young, the country was young, and the civilization to which they belonged, teeming there upon the green, Western fringe of the continent, was young and heady and tumultuous with the boisterous, red blood of a new race.

Condy even forgot, or rather disdained on such a morning as that, to piece together and rearrange Captain Jack's yarns into story form. To look at the sea and the green hills, to watch the pink on Blix's cheek and her yellow hair blowing across her eyes and lips, was better than thinking. Life was better than literature. To live was better than to read; one live human being was better than ten thousand Shakespeares; an act was better than a thought. Why, just to love Blix, to be with her, to see the sweet, clean flush of her cheek, to know that she was there at his side, and to have the touch of her elbow as they walked, was better than the best story, the greatest novel he could ever hope to write. Life was better than literature, and love was the best thing in life. To love Blix and to be near her—what else was worth while? Could he ever think of finding anything in life sweeter and finer than this dear young girl of nineteen?

Suddenly Condy came to himself with an abrupt start. What was this he was thinking—what was this he was telling himself? Love Blix! He loved Blix! Why, of *course* he loved her—loved her so, that with the thought of it there came a great, sudden clutch at the heart and a strange sense of tenderness, so vague and yet so great that it eluded speech and all expression. Love her! Of course he loved her! He had, all unknowing, loved her even before this wonderful morning: had loved her that day at the lake, and that never-to-be-forgotten, delicious afternoon in the Chinese restaurant; all those long, quiet evenings spent in the window of the little dining-room, looking down upon the darkening city, he had loved her. Why, all his days for the last few months had been full of the love of her.

How else had he been so happy? how else did it come about that little by little he was withdrawing from the society and influence of his artificial world, as represented by such men as Sargeant? how else was he slowly loosening the grip of the one evil and vicious habit that had clutched him so long? how else was his ambition stirring? how else was his hitherto aimless enthusiasm hardening to energy and determination? She had not always so influenced him. In the days when they had just known each other, and met each other in the weekly course of their formal life, it had not

been so, even though they pretended a certain amount of affection. He remembered the evening when Blix had brought those days to an abrupt end, and how at the moment he had told himself that after all he had never known the real Blix. Since then, in the charming, unconventional life they had led, everything had been changed. He had come to know her for what she was, to know her genuine goodness, her sincerity, her contempt of affectations, her comradeship, her calm, fine strength and unbroken good nature; and day by day, here a little and there a little, his love for her had grown so quietly, so evenly, that he had never known it, until now, behold! it was suddenly come to flower, full and strong—a flower whose fragrance had suddenly filled all his life and all his world with its sweetness.

Half an hour after leaving the lifeboat station, Condy and Blix reached the old, red-brick fort, deserted, abandoned, and rime-incrusted, at the entrance of the Golden Gate. They turned its angle, and there rolled the Pacific, a blue floor of shifting water, stretching out there forever and forever over the curve of the earth, over the shoulder of the world, with never a sail in view and never a break from horizon to horizon.

They followed down the shore, sometimes upon the old and broken flume that runs along the seaward face of the hills that rise from the beach, or sometimes upon the beach itself, stepping from bowlder to bowlder, or holding along at the edge of the water upon reaches of white, hard sand.

The beach was solitary; not a soul was in sight. Close at hand, to landward, great hills, bare and green, shut off the sky; and here and there the land came tumbling down into the sea in great, jagged, craggy rocks, knee-deep in swirling foam, and all black with wet. The air was full of the prolonged thunder of the surf, and at intervals sea-birds passed overhead with an occasional piping cry. Wreckage was tumbled about here and there; and innumerable cocoanut shards, huge, brown cups of fuzzy bark, lay underfoot and in the crevices of the rocks. They found a jelly-fish—a pulpy, translucent mass; and once even caught a sight of a seal in the hollow of a breaker, with sleek and shining head, his barbels bristling, and heard his hoarse croaking bark as he hunted the offshore fish.

Blix refused to allow Condy to help her in the least. She was quite as active and strong as he, and clambered from rock to rock and over the shattered scantling of the flume with the vigor and

agility of a young boy. She muddied her shoes to the very tops, scratched her hands, tore her skirt, and even twisted her ankle; but her little eyes were never so bright, nor was the pink flush of her cheeks ever more adorable. And she was never done talking—a veritable chatterbox. She saw everything and talked about everything she saw, quite indifferent as to whether or no Condy listened. Now it was a queer bit of seaweed, now it was a group of gulls clamoring over a dead fish, now a purple starfish, now a breaker of unusual size. Her splendid vitality carried her away. She was excited, alive to her very finger-tips, vibrant to the least sensation, quivering to the least impression.

"Let's get up here and sit down somewhere," said Condy, at length.

They left the beach and climbed up the slope of the hills, near a point where a long arm of land thrust out into the sea and shut off the wind; a path was there, and they followed it for a few yards, till they had come to a little amphitheatre surrounded with blackberry bushes.

Here they sat down, Blix settling herself on an old log with a little sigh of contentment, Condy stretching himself out, a new-lighted pipe in his teeth, his head resting on the little handbag he had persistently carried ever since morning. Then Blix fell suddenly silent, and for a long time the two sat there without speaking, absorbed in the enjoyment of looking at the enormous green hills rolling down to the sea, the breakers thundering at the beach, the gashed pinnacles of rock, the vast reach of the Pacific, and the distant prospect of the old fort at the entrance of the Golden Gate.

"We might be a thousand miles away from the city, for all the looks of it, mightn't we, Condy?" said Blix, after a while. "And I'm that *hungry!* It must be nearly noon."

For answer, Condy sat up with profound gravity, and with a great air of nonchalance opened the handbag, and, instead of shoes, took out, first, a pint bottle of claret, then "devilish" ham sandwiches in oiled paper, a bottle of stuffed olives, a great bag of salted almonds, two little tumblers, a paper-covered novel, and a mouth organ.

Blix fairly crowed with delight, clasping her hands upon her knees, and rocking to and fro where she sat upon the log.

"Oh, Condy, and you thought of a *lunch*—you said it was shoes—and you remembered I loved stuffed olives, too; and a book to

read. What is it—'The Seven Seas.' No, I never *was* so happy. But the mouth organ—what's that for?"

"To play on. What did you think—think it was a can-opener?"

Blix choked with merriment over his foolery, and Condy added proudly:

"Look there! *I* made those sandwiches!"

They looked as though he had—great, fat chunks of bread, the crust still on; the "devilish" ham in thick strata between; and, positively, he had *buttered* the bread. But it was all one with them; they ate as though at a banquet, and Blix even took off her hat and hung it upon one of the nearby bushes. Of course Condy had forgotten a corkscrew. He tried to dig out the cork of the claret bottle with his knife, until he had broken both blades and was about to give up in despair, when Blix, at the end of her patience, took the bottle from him and pushed in the cork with her finger.

"Wine, music, literature, and feasting," observed Condy. "We're getting regularly luxurious, just like Sardine-apalus."

But Condy himself had suddenly entered into an atmosphere of happiness, the like of which he had never known or dreamed of before. He loved Blix—he had just discovered it. He loved her because she was so genuine, so radiantly fresh and strong; loved her because she liked the things that he liked, because they two looked at the world from precisely the same point of view, hating shams and affectations, happy in the things that were simple and honest and natural. He loved her because she liked his books, appreciating the things therein that he appreciated, liking what he liked, disapproving of what he condemned. He loved her because she was nineteen, and because she was so young and unspoiled and was happy just because the ocean was blue and the morning fine. He loved her because she was so pretty, because of the softness of her yellow hair, because of her round, white forehead and pink cheeks, because of her little, dark-brown eyes, with that look in them as if she were just done smiling or just about to smile, one could not say which; loved her because of her good, firm mouth and chin, because of her full neck and its high, tight bands of white satin. And he loved her because her arms were strong and round, and because she wore the great dog-collar around her trim, firm-corseted waist, and because there emanated from her with every movement a barely perceptible, delicious, feminine odor, that was in part perfume, but mostly a subtle, vague aroma, charming beyond words, that came from her mouth, her hair, her neck, her arms, her whole

sweet personality. And he loved her because she was herself, because she was Blix, because of that strange, sweet influence that was disengaged from her in those quiet moments when she seemed so close to him, when some unnamed, mysterious sixth sense in him stirred and woke and told him of her goodness, of her clean purity and womanliness; and that certain, vague tenderness in him went out toward her, a tenderness not for her only, but for all the good things of the world; and he felt his nobler side rousing up and the awakening of the desire to be his better self.

Covertly he looked at her, as she sat near him, her yellow hair rolling and blowing back from her forehead, her hands clasped over her knee, looking out over the ocean, thoughtful, her eyes wide.

She had told him she did not love him. Condy remembered that perfectly well. She was sincere in the matter; she did not love him. That subject had been once and for all banished from their intercourse. And it was because of that very reason that their companionship of the last three or four months had been so charming. She looked upon him merely as a chum. She had not changed in the least from that time until now, whereas he—why, all his world was new for him that morning! Why, he loved her so, she had become so dear to him, that the very thought of her made his heart swell and leap.

But he must keep all this to himself. If he spoke to her, told her of how he loved her, it would spoil and end their companionship upon the instant. They had both agreed upon that; they had tried the other, and it had worked out. As lovers they had wearied of each other; as chums they had been perfectly congenial, thoroughly and completely happy.

Condy set his teeth. It was a hard situation. He must choose between bringing an end to this charming comradeship of theirs, or else fight back all show of love for her, keep it down and under hand, and that at a time when every nerve of him quivered like a smitten harp-string. It was not in him or in his temperament to love her calmly, quietly, or at a distance; he wanted the touch of her hand, the touch of her cool, smooth cheek, the delicious aroma of her breath in his nostrils, her lips against his, her hair and all its fragrance in his face.

"Condy, what's the matter?" Blix was looking at him with an expression of no little concern. "What are you frowning so about, and clinching your fists? And you're pale, too. What's gone wrong?"

He shot a glance at her, and bestirred himself sharply.

"Isn't this a jolly little corner?" he said. "Blix, how long is it before you go?"

"Six weeks from to-morrow."

"And you're going to be gone four years—four years! Maybe you never will come back. Can't tell what will happen in four years. Where's the blooming mouth-organ?"

But the mouth-organ was full of crumbs. Condy could not play on it. To all his efforts it responded only by gasps, mournfulest death-rattles, and lamentable wails. Condy hurled it into the sea.

"Well, where's the blooming book, then?" he demanded. "You're sitting on it, Blix. Here, read something in it. Open it anywhere."

"No; you read to me."

"I will not. Haven't I done enough? Didn't I *buy* the book and get the lunch, and make the sandwiches, and pay the car-fare? I think this expedition will cost me pretty near three dollars before we're through with the day. No; the least you can do is to read to me. Here, we'll match for it."

Condy drew a dime from his pocket, and Blix a quarter from her purse.

"You're matching *me*," she said.

Condy tossed the coin and lost, and Blix said, as he picked up the book:

"For a man that has such unvarying bad luck as you, gambling is just simple madness. You and I have never played a game of poker yet that I've not won every cent of money you had."

"Yes; and what are you doing with it all?"

"Spending it," she returned loftily; "gloves and veils and lace pins—all kinds of things."

But Condy knew the way she spoke that this was not true.

For the next hour or so he read to her from "The Seven Seas," while the afternoon passed, the wind stirring the chaparral and blackberry bushes in the hollows of the huge, bare hills, the surf rolling and grumbling on the beach below, the sea-birds wheeling overhead. Blix listened intently, but Condy could not have told of what he was reading. Living was better than reading, life was better than literature, and his new-found love for her was poetry enough for him. He read so that he might not talk to her or look at her, for it seemed to him at times as though some second self in him would speak and betray him in spite of his best efforts. Never before in

all his life had he been so happy; never before had he been so troubled. He began to jumble the lines and words as he read, overrunning periods, even turning two pages at once.

"What a splendid line!" Blix exclaimed.

"What line—what—what are you talking about? Blix, let's always remember to-day. Let's make a promise, no matter what happens or where we are, let's always write to each other on the anniversary of to-day. What do you say?"

"Yes; I'll promise—and you—"

"I'll promise faithfully. Oh, I'll never forget to-day nor—yes, yes, I'll promise—why, to-day—Blix—where's that damn book gone?"

"Condy!"

"Well, I can't find the book. You're sitting on it again. Confound the book, anyway! Let's walk some more."

"We've a long ways to go if we're to get home in time for supper. Let's go to Luna's for supper."

"I never saw such a girl as you to think of ways for spending money. What kind of a purse-proud plutocrat do you think I am? I've only seventy-five cents left. How much have you got?"

Blix had fifty-five cents in her purse, and they had a grave council over their finances. They had just enough for car-fare and two "suppers Mexican," with ten cents left over."

"That's for Richard's tip," said Blix.

"That's for my *cigar*," he retorted.

"You made *me* give him fifty cents. You said it was the least I could offer him—*noblesse oblige*."

"Well, then, I *couldn't* offer him a dime, don't you see? I'll tell him we are broke this time."

They started home, not as they had come, but climbing the hill and going across a breezy open down, radiant with blue iris, wild heliotrope, yellow poppies, and even a violet here and there. A little further on they gained one of the roads of the Reservation, red earth smooth as a billiard table; and just at an angle where the road made a sharp elbow and trended cityward, they paused for a moment and looked down and back at the superb view of the ocean, the vast half-moon of land, and the rolling hills in the foreground tumbling down toward the beach and all spangled with wild flowers.

Some fifteen minutes later they reached the golf-links.

"We can go across the links," said Condy, "and strike any number of car lines on the other side."

They left the road and struck across the links, Condy smoking his new-lighted pipe. But as they came around the edge of a long line of eucalyptus trees near the teeing ground, a warning voice suddenly called out:

"Fore!"

Condy and Blix looked up sharply, and there in a group not twenty feet away, in tweeds and "knickers," in smart, short golfing skirts and plaid cloaks, they saw young Sargeant and his sister, two other girls whom they knew as members of the fashionable "set," and Jack Carter in the act of swinging his driving iron.

XI

As the clock in the library of the club struck midnight, Condy laid down his pen, shoved the closely written sheets of paper from him, and leaned back in his chair, his fingers to his tired eyes. He was sitting at a desk in one of the further corners of the room and shut off by a great Japanese screen. He was in his shirt-sleeves, his hair was tumbled, his fingers ink-stained, and his face a little pale.

Since late in the evening he had been steadily writing. Three chapters of "In Defiance of Authority" were done, and he was now at work on the fourth. The day after the excursion to the Presidio—that wonderful event which seemed to Condy to mark the birthday of some new man within him—the idea had suddenly occurred to him that Captain Jack's story of the club of the exiles, the boom restaurant, and the filibustering expedition was precisely the novel of adventure of which the Centennial Company had spoken. At once he had set to work upon it, with an enthusiasm that, with shut teeth, he declared would not be lacking in energy. The story would have to be written out of his business hours. That meant he would have to give up his evenings to it. But he had done this, and for nearly a week had settled himself to his task in the quiet corner of the club at eight o'clock, and held to it resolutely until twelve.

The first two chapters had run off his pen with delightful ease. The third came harder; the events and incidents of the story became confused and contradictory; the character of Billy Isham obstinately refused to take the prominent place which Condy had designed for him; and with the beginning of the fourth chapter, Condy had finally come to know the enormous difficulties, the exasperating compli-

cations, the discouragements that begin anew with every paragraph, the obstacles that refuse to be surmounted, and all the pain, the labor, the downright mental travail and anguish that fall to the lot of the writer of novels.

To write a short story with the end in plain sight from the beginning was an easy matter compared to the upbuilding, grain by grain, atom by atom, of the fabric of "In Defiance of Authority." Condy soon found that there was but one way to go about the business. He must shut his eyes to the end of his novel—that far-off, divine event—and take his task chapter by chapter, even paragraph by paragraph; grinding out the tale, as it were, by main strength, driving his pen from line to line, hating the effort, happy only with the termination of each chapter, and working away, hour by hour, minute by minute, with the dogged, sullen, hammer-and-tongs obstinacy of the galley-slave, scourged to his daily toil.

At times the tale, apparently out of sheer perversity, would come to a full stop. To write another word seemed beyond the power of human ingenuity, and for an hour or more Condy would sit scowling at the half-written page, gnawing his nails, scouring his hair, dipping his pen into the ink-well, and squaring himself to the sheet of paper, all to no purpose.

There was no pleasure in it for him. A character once fixed in his mind, a scene once pictured in his imagination, and even before he had written a word the character lost the charm of its novelty, the scene the freshness of its original conception. Then, with infinite painstaking and with a patience little short of miraculous, he must slowly build up, brick by brick, the plan his brain had outlined in a single instant. It was all work—hard, disagreeable, laborious work; and no juggling with phrases, no false notions as to the "delight of creation," could make it appear otherwise. "And for what," he muttered as he rose, rolled up his sheaf of manuscript, and put on his coat; "what do I do it for, *I* don't know."

It was beyond question that, had he begun his novel three months before this time, Condy would have long since abandoned the hateful task. But Blix had changed all that. A sudden male force had begun to develop in Condy. A master-emotion had shaken him, and he had commenced to see and to feel the serious, more abiding, and perhaps the sterner side of life. Blix had steadied him, there was no denying that. He was not quite the same boyish, hairbrained fellow who had made "a buffoon of himself" in the Chinese restaurant, three months before.

The cars had stopped running by the time Condy reached the street. He walked home and flung himself to bed, his mind tired, his nerves unstrung, and all the blood of his body apparently concentrated in his brain. Working at night after writing all day long was telling upon him, and he knew it.

What with his work and his companionship with Blix, Condy soon began to drop out of his wonted place in his "set." He was obliged to decline one invitation after another that would take him out in the evening, and instead of lunching at his club with Sargeant or George Hands, as he had been accustomed to do at one time, he fell into another habit of lunching with Blix at the flat on Washington Street, and spending the two hours allowed to him in the middle of the day in her company.

Condy's desertion of them was often spoken of by the men of his club with whom he had been at one time so intimate, and the subject happened to be brought up again one noon when Jack Carter was in the club as George Hands' guest. Hands, Carter, and Eckert were at one of the windows over their after-dinner cigars and liqueurs.

"I say," said Eckert suddenly, "who's that girl across the street there—the one in black, just going by that furrier's sign? I've seen her somewhere before. Know who it is?"

"That's Miss Bessemer, isn't it?" said George Hands, leaning forward. "Rather a stunning-looking girl."

"Yes, that's Travis Bessemer," assented Jack Carter; adding, a moment later, "it's too bad about that girl."

"What's the matter?" asked Eckert.

Carter lifted a shoulder. "Isn't *anything* the matter as far as I know, only somehow the best people have dropped her. She *used* to be received everywhere."

"Come to think, I *haven't* seen her out much this season," said Eckert. "But I heard she had bolted from 'Society' with the big S, and was going East—going to study medicine, I believe."

"I've always noticed," said Carter, with a smile, "that so soon as a girl is *declassée*, she develops a purpose in life, and gets earnest, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, well, come," growled George Hands, "Travis Bessemer is not *declassée*."

"I didn't say she was," answered Carter; "but she has made herself talked about a good deal lately. Going around with Rivers, as she does, isn't the most discreet thing in the world. Of course,

it's all right, but it all makes talk, and I came across them by a grove of trees out on the links the other day—"

"Yes," observed Sargeant, leaning on the back of Carter's armchair; "yes; and I noticed, too, that she cut you dead. You fellows should have been there," he went on, in perfect good humor, turning to the others. "You missed a good little scene. Rivers and Miss Bessemer had been taking a tramp over the Reservation—and, by the way, it's a great place to walk, so my sister tells me; she and Dick Forsythe take a constitutional out there every Saturday morning—well, as I was saying, Rivers and Miss Bessemer came upon our party rather unexpectedly. We were all togged out in our golfing bags, and I presume we looked more like tailor's models, posing for the gallery, than people who were taking an outing; but Rivers and Miss Bessemer had been regularly exercising; looked as though they had done their fifteen miles since morning. They had their old clothes on, and they were dusty and muddy.

"You would have thought that a young girl such as Miss Bessemer is—for she's very young—would have been a little embarrassed at running up against such a spick and span lot as we were. Not a bit of it; didn't lose her poise for a moment. She bowed to my sister and to me, as though from the top of a drag, by Jove! and as though she were fresh from Redfern and Virot. You know a girl that can manage herself that way is a thoroughbred. She even remembered to cut little Johnnie Carter here, because Johnnie forced himself upon her one night at a dance when he was drunk; didn't she, Johnnie? Johnnie came up to her there, out on the links, fresh as a daisy, and put out his hand, with, 'Why, how do you do, Miss Bessemer?' and 'wherever did you come from?' and 'I haven't seen you in so long'; and she says, 'No, not since our last dance, I believe, Mr. Carter,' and looked at his hand as though it was something funny.

"Little Johnnie mumbled and flushed and stammered and backed off; and it was well that he did, because Rivers had begun to get red around the wattles. *I* say the little girl is a thoroughbred, and my sister wants to give her a dinner as soon as she comes out. But Johnnie says she's *declassée*, so may be my sister had better think it over."

"I didn't say she was *declassée*," exclaimed Carter. "I only said she would do well to be more careful."

Sargeant shifted his cigar to the other corner of his mouth, one eye shut to avoid the smoke.

"One might say as much of lots of people," he answered.

"I don't like your tone!" Carter flared out.

"Oh, go to the devil, Johnnie! Shall we all have a drink?"

On the Friday evening of that week, Condy set himself to his work at his accustomed hour. But he had had a hard day on the "Times," Supplement, and his brain, like an overdriven horse, refused to work. In half an hour he had not written a paragraph.

"I thought it would be better, in the end, to loaf for one evening," he explained to Blix, some twenty minutes later, as they settled themselves in the little dining-room. "I can go at it better to-morrow. See how you like this last chapter."

Blix was enthusiastic over "In Defiance of Authority." Condy had told her the outline of the story, and had read to her each chapter as he finished it.

"It's the best thing you have ever done, Condy, and you know it. I suppose it has faults, but I don't care anything about them. It's the story itself that's so interesting. After that first chapter of the boom restaurant and the exiles' club, nobody would want to lay the book down. You're doing the best work of your life so far, and you stick to it."

"It's grinding out copy for the Supplement at the same time that takes all the starch out of me. You've no idea what it means to write all day, and then sit down and write all evening."

"I *wish* you could get off the 'Times,'" said Blix. "You're just giving the best part of your life to hack work, and *now* it's interfering with your novel. I know you could do better work on your novel if you didn't have to work on the 'Times,' couldn't you?"

"Oh, if you come to that, of course I could," he answered. "But they won't give me a vacation. I was sounding the editor on it day before yesterday. No; I'll have to manage somehow to swing the two together."

"Well, let's not talk shop now, Condy. You need a rest. Do you want to play poker?"

They played for upward of an hour that evening, and Condy, as usual, lost. His ill-luck was positively astonishing. During the last two months he had played poker with Blix on an average of three or four evenings in the week, and at the close of every game it was Blix who had all the chips.

Blix had come to know the game quite as well, if not better, than he. She could almost invariably tell when Condy held a good hand, but on her part could assume an air of indifference absolutely inscrutable.

"Cards?" said Condy, picking up the deck after the deal.

"I'll stand pat, Condy."

"The deuce you say," he answered, with a stare. "I'll take three."

"I'll pass it up to you," continued Blix gravely.

"Well—well, I'll bet you five chips."

"Raise you twenty."

Condy studied his hand, laid down the cards, picked them up again, scratched his head, and moved uneasily in his place. Then he threw down two high pairs.

"No," he said; "I won't see you. What did you have? Let's see, just for the fun of it."

Blix spread her cards on the table.

"Not a blessed thing!" exclaimed Condy. "I might have known it. There's my last dollar gone, too. Lend me fifty cents, Blix."

Blix shook her head.

"Why, what a little niggard!" he exclaimed aggrievedly. "I'll pay them all back to you."

"Now, why should I lend you money to play against me? I'll not give you a chip; and, besides, I don't want to play any more. Let's stop."

"I've a mind to stop for good; stop playing even with you."

Blix gave a little cry of joy.

"Oh, Condy, will you, could you? and never, never touch a card again? never play for money? I'd be so happy—but don't unless you know you would keep your promise. I would much rather have you play every night, down there at your club, than break your promise."

Condy fell silent, biting thoughtfully at the knuckle of a forefinger.

"Think twice about it, Condy," urged Blix; "because this would be for always."

Condy hesitated; then, abstractedly and as though speaking to himself:

"It's different now. Before we took that—three months ago, I don't say. It was harder for me to quit then, but now—well, everything is different now; and it would please you, Blixy!"

"More than anything else I can think of, Condy."

He gave her his hand.

"That settles it," he said quietly. "I'll never gamble again, Blix."

Blix gripped his hand hard, then jumped up, and, with a quick

breath of satisfaction, gathered up the cards and chips and flung them into the fireplace.

"Oh, I'm so glad that's over with," she exclaimed, her little eyes dancing. "I've pretended to like it, but I've hated it all the time. You don't know *how* I've hated it! What men can see in it to make them sit up all night long is beyond me. And you truly mean, Condy, that you never will gamble again? Yes, I know you mean it this time. Oh, I'm so happy I could sing!"

"Good Heavens, don't do that!" he cried quickly. "You're a nice, amiable girl, Blix, even if you're not pretty, and you—"

"Oh, bother you!" she retorted; "but you promise?"

"On my honor."

"That's enough," she said quietly.

But even when "loafing" as he was this evening, Condy could not rid himself of the thought and recollection of his novel; resting or writing, it haunted him. Otherwise he would not have been the story-writer that he was. From now on until he should set down the last sentence, the "thing" was never to let him alone, never to allow him a moment's peace. He could think of nothing else, could talk of nothing else; every faculty of his brain, every sense of observation or imagination incessantly concentrated themselves upon this one point.

As they sat in the bay window watching the moon rise, his mind was still busy with it, and he suddenly broke out:

"I ought to work some kind of a *treasure* into the yarn. What's a story of adventure without a treasure? By Jove, Blix, I wish I could give my whole time to this stuff! It's ripping good material, and it ought to be handled as carefully as glass. Ought to be worked up, you know."

"Condy," said Blix, looking at him intently, "what is it stands in your way of leaving the 'Times'? Would they take you back if you left them long enough to write your novel? You could write it in a month, couldn't you, if you had nothing else to do? Suppose you left them for a month—would they hold your place for you?"

"Yes—yes, I think they would; but in the meanwhile, Blix—there's the rub. I've never saved a cent out of my salary. When I stop, my pay stops, and wherewithal would I be fed? What are you looking for in that drawer—matches? Here, I've got a match."

Blix faced about at the sideboard, shutting the drawer by leaning against it. In both hands she held one of the delft sugar-bowls. She came up to the table, and emptied its contents upon the blue

denim table-cover—two or three gold pieces, some fifteen silver dollars, and a handful of small change.

Disregarding all Condy's inquiries, she counted it, making little piles of the gold and silver and nickel pieces.

"Thirty-five and seven is forty-two," she murmured, counting off on her fingers, "and six is forty-eight, and ten is fifty-eight, and ten is sixty-eight; and here is ten, twenty, thirty, fifty-five cents in change." She thrust it all toward him, across the table. "There," she said, "is your wherewithal."

Condy stared. "My wherewithal!" he muttered.

"It ought to be enough for over a month."

"Where did you get all that? Whose is it?"

"It's your money, Condy. You loaned it to me, and now it has come in very handy."

"I *loaned* it to you?"

"It's the money I won from you during the time you've been playing poker with me. You didn't know it would amount to so much, did you?"

"Pshaw, I'll not touch it!" he exclaimed, drawing back from the money as though it was red-hot.

"Yes, you will," she told him. "I've been saving it up for you, Condy, every penny of it, from the first day we played down there at the lake; and I always told myself that the moment you made up your mind to quit playing, I would give it back to you."

"Why, the very idea!" he vociferated, his hands deep in his pockets, his face scarlet. "It's—it's preposterous, Blix! I won't let you *talk* about it even—I won't touch a nickel of that money. But, Blix, you're—you're—the finest woman I ever knew. You're a man's woman, that's what you are." He set his teeth. "If you loved a man, you'd be a regular pal to him; you'd back him up, you'd stand by him till the last gun was fired. I could do *anything* if a *woman* like you cared for me. Why, Blix, I—you haven't any idea—" He cleared his throat, stopping abruptly.

"But you must take this money," she answered; "*your* money. If you didn't, Condy, it would make me out nothing more nor less than a gambler. I wouldn't have dreamed of playing cards with you if I had ever intended to keep one penny of your money. From the very start I intended to keep it for you, and give it back to you so soon as you would stop; and now you have a chance to put this money to a good use. You don't have to stay on the 'Times' now. You can't do your novel justice while you are doing your hack

work at the same time, and I do so want 'In Defiance of Authority' to be a success. I've faith in you, Condy. I know if you got the opportunity you would make a success."

"But you and I have played like two men playing," exclaimed Condy. "How would it look if Sargeant, say, should give me back the money he had won from me? What a cad I would be to take it!"

"That's just it—we've not played like two men. Then I *would* have been a gambler. I've played with you because I thought it would make a way for you to break off with the habit; and knowing as I did how fond you were of playing cards and how bad it was for you, how wicked it would have been for me to have played with you in any other spirit! Don't you see? And as it has turned out, you've given up playing, and you've enough money to make it possible for you to write your novel. The Centennial Company have asked you to try a story of adventure for them, you've found one that is splendid, you're just the man who could handle it, and now you've got the money to make it possible. Condy," she exclaimed suddenly, "don't you see your *chance?* Aren't you a big enough man to see your chance when it comes? And, besides, do you think I would take *money* from you? Can't you understand? If you don't take this money that belongs to you, you would insult me. That is just the way I would feel about it. You must see that. If you care for me at all, you'll take it."

. . . . . .

The editor of the Sunday Supplement put his toothpick behind his ear and fixed Condy with his eyeglasses.

"Well, it's like this, Rivers," he said. "Of course, you know your own business best. If you stay on here with us, it will be all right. But I may as well tell you that I don't believe I can hold your place for a month. I can't get a man in here to do your work for just a month, and then fire him out at the end of that time. I don't like to lose you, but if you have an opportunity to get in on another paper during this vacation of yours, you're at liberty to do so, for all of me."

"Then you think my chance of coming back here would be pretty slim if I leave for a month now?"

"That's right."

There was a silence. Condy hesitated; then he rose.

"I'll take the chance," he announced.

To Blix, that evening, as he told her of the affair, he said: "It's neck or nothing now, Blix."

XII

But did Blix care for him?

In the retired corner of his club, shut off by the Japanese screen, or going up and down the city to and from his work, or sitting with her in the bay window of the little dining-room looking down upon the city, blurred in the twilight or radiant with the sunset, Condy asked himself the question. A score of times each day he came to a final, definite, negative decision; and a score of times reopened the whole subject. Beyond the fact that Blix had enjoyed herself in his company during the last months, Condy could find no sign or trace of encouragement; and for that matter he told himself that the indications pointed rather in the other direction. She had no compunction in leaving him to go away to New York, perhaps never to return. In less than a month now all their companionship was to end, and he would probably see the last of her.

He dared not let her know that at last he had really come to love her—that it was no pretence now; for he knew that with such declaration their "good times" would end even before she should go away. But every day, every hour that they were together made it harder for him to keep himself within bounds.

What with this trouble on his mind and the grim determination with which he held to his work, Condy changed rapidly. Blix had steadied him, and a certain earnestness and seriousness of purpose, a certain *strength* he had not known before, came swiftly into being.

Was Blix to go away, leave him, perhaps for all time, and not know how much he cared? Would he speak before she went? Condy did not know. It was a question that circumstances would help him to decide. He would not speak, so he resolved, unless he was sure that she cared herself; and if she did, she herself would give him a cue, a hint whereon to speak. But days went by, the time set for Blix's departure drew nearer and nearer, and yet she gave him not the slightest sign.

These two interests had now absorbed his entire life for the moment—his love for Blix, and his novel. Little by little "In Defiance of Authority" took shape. The boom restaurant and the club

of the exiles were disposed of, Billy Isham began to come to the front, the filibustering expedition and Señora Estrada (with her torn calling card) had been introduced, and the expedition was ready to put to sea. But here a new difficulty was encountered.

"What do I know about ships?" Condy confessed to Blix. "If Billy Isham is going to command a filibustering schooner, I've got to know something about a schooner—appear to, anyhow. I've got to know nautical lingo, the *real* thing, you know. I don't believe a *real* sailor ever in his life said 'belay there,' or 'avast.' We'll have to go out and see Captain Jack; get some more technical detail."

This move was productive of the most delightful results. Captain Jack was all on fire with interest the moment that Condy and Blix told him of the idea.

"An' you're going to put Billy Isham in a book. Well, strike me straight, that's a snorkin' good idea. I've always said that all Billy needed was a ticket seller an' an advance agent, an' he was a whole show in himself."

"We're going to send it East," said Blix, "as soon as it's finished, and have it published."

"Well, it ought to make prime readin', Miss; an' that's a good fetchin' title, 'In Defiance of Authority.'"

Regularly Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, Blix and Condy came out to the lifeboat station. Captain Jack received them in sweater and visored cap, and ushered them into the front room.

"Well, how's the yarn getting on?" Captain Jack would ask.

Then Condy would read the last chapter while the Captain paced the floor, frowning heavily, smoking cigars, listening to every word. Condy told the story in the first person, as if Billy Isham's partner were narrating scenes and events in which he himself had moved. Condy called this protagonist "Burke Cassowan," and was rather proud of the name. But the captain would none of it. Cassowan, the protagonist, was simply "Our Mug."

"Now," Condy would say, notebook in hand, "now, Cap., we've got down to Mazatlan. Now I want to sort of organize the expedition in this next chapter."

"I see, I see," Captain Jack would exclaim, interested at once. "Wait a bit till I take off my shoes. I can think better with my shoes off"; and having removed his shoes, he would begin to pace the room in his stocking feet, puffing fiercely on his cigar as he warmed to the tale, blowing the smoke out through either ear, gesturing savagely, his face flushed and his eyes kindling.

"Well, now, lessee. First thing Our Mug does when he gets to Mazatlan is to communicate his arrival to Señora Estrada—telegraphs, you know; and, by the way, have him use a cipher."

"What kind of cipher?"

"Count three letters on from the right letter, see. If you were spelling 'boat,' for instance, you would begin with an *e*, the third letter after *b;* then *r* for the *o*, *r* being the third letter from *o*. So you'd spell 'boat,' *erdw;* and Señora Estrada knows when she gets that despatch that she must count three letters *back* from each letter to get the right ones. Take now such a cipher word as *ulioh*. That means *rifle*. Count three letters back from each letter of *ulioh*, and it'll spell *rifle*. You can make up a lot of despatches like that, just to have the thing look natural; savvy?"

"Out of sight!" muttered Condy, making a note.

"Then Our Mug and Billy Isham start getting a crew. And Our Mug, he buys the sextant there in Mazatlan—the sextant, that got out of order and spoiled everything. Or, no; don't have it a sextant; have it a quadrant—an old-fashioned, ebony quadrant. Have Billy Isham buy it because it was cheap."

"How did it get out of order, Captain Jack?" inquired Blix. "That would be a good technical detail, wouldn't it, Condy?"

"Well, it's like this. Our Mug an' Billy get a schooner that's so bally small that they have to do their cooking in the cabin; quadrant's on a rack over the stove, and the heat warps the joints, so when Our Mug takes his observation he gets fifty miles off his course and raises the land where the government forces are watching for him."

"And here's another point, Cap.," said Condy. "We ought to work some kind of a treasure into this yarn; can't you think up something new and original in the way of a treasure? I don't want the old game of a buried chest of money. Let's have him get track of something that's worth a fortune—something novel."

"Yes, yes; I see the idea," answered the Captain, striding over the floor with great thuds of his stockinged feet. "Now, lessee; let me think," he began, rubbing all his hair the wrong way. "We want something new and queer, something that ain't ever been written up before. I tell you what! Here it is! Have Our Mug get wind of a little river schooner that sunk fifty years before his time in one of the big South American rivers, during a flood—I heard of this myself. Schooner went down and was buried twenty feet under mud and sand; and since that time—you know how the

big rivers act—the whole blessed course of the river has changed at that point, and the schooner is on dry land, or rather twenty feet under it, and as sound as the day she was chartered."

"Well?"

"Well, have it that when she sank she had aboard of her a cargo of five hundred cases of whiskey, prime stuff, seven thousand quart bottles, sealed up tight as drums. Now Our Mug—nor Billy Isham either—they ain't born yesterday. No, sir; they're right next to themselves! They figure this way. This here whiskey's been kept fifty years without being moved. Now, what do you suppose seven thousand quart bottles of fifty-year-old whiskey would be worth? Why, twenty dollars a quart wouldn't be too fancy. So there you are; there's your treasure. Our Mug and Billy Isham have only got to dig through twenty feet of sand to pick up a hundred thousand dollars, *if they can find the schooner.*"

Blix clapped her hands with a little cry of delight, and Condy smote a knee, exclaiming:

"By Jove! that's as good as Loudon Dodds' opium ship! Why, Cap., you're a treasure in yourself for a fellow looking for stories."

Then after the notes were taken and the story talked over, Captain Jack, especially if the day happened to be Sunday, would insist upon their staying to dinner—boiled beef and cabbage, smoking coffee and pickles—that K. D. B. served in the little, brick-paved kitchen in the back of the station. The crew messed in their quarters overhead.

K. D. B. herself was not uninteresting. Her respectability incased her like armor plate, and she never laughed without putting three fingers to her lips. She told them that she had at one time been a "costume reader."

"A costume reader?"

"Yes; reading extracts from celebrated authors in the appropriate costume of the character. It used to pay very well, and it was very refined. I used to do 'In a Balcony,' by Mister Browning, and 'Laska,' the same evening, and it always made a hit. I'd do 'In a Balcony' first, and I'd put on a Louis-Quinze-the-fifteenth gown and wig-to-match over a female cowboy outfit. When I'd finished 'In a Balcony,' I'd do an exit, and shunt the gown and wig-to-match, and come on as 'Laska,' with thunder noises off. It was one of the strongest effects in my repertoire, and it always got me a curtain call."

And Captain Jack would wag his head and murmur:

"Extraordinary! extraordinary!"

Blix and Condy soon noted that upon the occasion of each one of their visits, K. D. B. found means to entertain them at great length with long discussions upon certain subjects of curiously diversified character. Upon their first visit she elected to talk upon the Alps mountains. The Sunday following it was bacteriology; on the next Wednesday it was crystals; while for two hours during their next visit to the station, Condy and Blix were obliged to listen to K. D. B.'s interminable discourse on the origin, history, and development of the kingdom of Denmark. Condy was dumfounded.

"I never met such a person, man or woman, in all my life. Talk about education! Why, I think she knows everything!"

"In Defiance of Authority" soon began to make good progress, but Condy, once launched upon technical navigation, must have Captain Jack at his elbow continually, to keep him from foundering. In some sea novel he remembered to have come across the expression "garboard streak," and from the context guessed it was to be applied to a detail of a vessel's construction. In an unguarded moment he had written that his schooner's name "was painted in showy gilt letters upon her garboard streak."

"What's the garboard streak, Condy?" Blix had asked, when he had read the chapter to her.

"That's where they paint her name," he declared promptly. "I don't know exactly, but I like the sound of it."

But the next day, when he was reading this same chapter to Captain Jack, the latter suddenly interrupted with an exclamation as of acute physical anguish.

"What's that? Read that last over again," he demanded.

"'When they had come within a few boat's lengths,'" read Condy, "'they were able to read the schooner's name, painted in showy gilt letters upon her garboard streak.'"

"My God!" gasped the Captain, clasping his head. Then, with a shout: "Garboard streak! garboard streak? Don't you know that the garboard streak is the last plank next the keel? You mean counter, not garboard streak. That regularly graveled me, that did!"

They stayed to dinner with the couple that afternoon, and for half an hour afterward K. D. B. told them of the wonders of the caves of Elephantis. One would have believed that she had actually been at the place. But when she changed the subject to the science of fortification, Blix could no longer restrain herself.

"But it is really wonderful that you should know all these things! Where *did* you find time to study so much?"

"One must have an education," returned K. D. B. primly.

But Condy had caught sight of a half-filled book-shelf against the opposite wall, and had been suddenly smitten with an inspiration. On a leaf of his notebook he wrote: "Try her on the G's and H's," and found means to show it furtively to Blix. But Blix was puzzled, and at the earliest opportunity Condy himself said to the retired costume reader:

"Speaking of fortifications, Mrs. Hoskins, Gibraltar now—that's a wonderful rock, isn't it?"

"Rock!" she queried. "I thought it was an island."

"Oh, no; it's a fortress. They have a castle there—a castle, something like—well, like the old Schloss at Heidelberg. Did you ever hear about or read about Heidelberg University?"

But K. D. B. was all abroad now. Gibraltar and Heidelberg were unknown subjects to her, as were also inoculation, Japan, and Kosciusko. Above the G's she was sound; below that point her ignorance was benighted.

"But what is it, Condy?" demanded Blix, as soon as they were alone.

"I've the idea," he answered, chuckling. "Wait till after Sunday to see if I'm right; then I'll tell you. It's a dollar to a paper dime, K. D. B. will have something for us by Sunday, beginning with an I."

And she had. It was Internal Revenue.

"Right! right!" Condy shouted gleefully, as he and Blix were on their way home. "I knew it. She's done with Ash—Bol, Bol—Car, and all those, and has worked through Cod—Dem, and Dem—Eve. She's down to Hor—Kin now, and she'll go through the whole lot before she's done—Kin—Mag, Mag—Mot, Mot—Pal, and all the rest."

"The Encyclopædia?"

"Don't you see it? No wonder she didn't know beans about Gibraltar! She hadn't come to the G's by then."

"She's reading the Encyclopædia."

"And she gets the volumes on the instalment plan, don't you see? Reads the leading articles, and then springs 'em on us. To know things and talk about 'em, that's her idea of being cultured. 'One must have an education.' Do you remember her saying that? Oh, our matrimonial objects are panning out beyond all expectation!"

What a delicious, never-to-be-forgotten month it was for those two! There in the midst of life they were as much alone as upon a tropic island. Blix had deliberately freed herself from a world that had grown distasteful to her; Condy little by little had dropped away from his place among the men and the women of his acquaintance, and the two came and went together, living in a little world of their own creation, happy in each other's society, living only in the present, and asking nothing better than to be left alone and to their own devices.

They saw each other every day. In the morning from nine till twelve, and in the afternoon until three, Condy worked away upon his novel; but not an evening passed that did not see him and Blix in the dining-room of the little flat. Thursdays and Sunday afternoons they visited the life-boat station, and at other times prowled about the unfrequented corners of the city, now passing an afternoon along the water front, watching the departure of a China steamer or the loading of the great, steel wheat ships; now climbing the ladder-like streets of Telegraph Hill, or revisiting the Plaza, Chinatown, and the restaurant; or taking long walks in the Presidio Reservation, watching cavalry and artillery drills; or sitting for hours on the rocks by the seashore, watching the ceaseless roll and plunge of the surf, the wheeling sea-birds, and the sleek-headed seals hunting the offshore fish, happy for a half-hour when they surprised one with his prey in his teeth.

One day, some three weeks before the end of the year, toward two in the afternoon, Condy sat in his usual corner of the club, behind the screen, writing rapidly. His coat was off and the stump of a cigar was between his teeth. At his elbow was the rectangular block of his manuscript. During the last week the story had run from him with a facility that had surprised and delighted him; words came to him without effort, ranging themselves into line with the promptitude of well-drilled soldiery; sentences and paragraphs marched down the clean-swept spaces of his paper, like companies and platoons defiling upon review; his chapters were brigades that he marshaled at will, falling them in one behind the other, each preceded by its chapter-head, like an officer in the space between two divisions. In the guise of a commander-in-chief sitting his horse upon an eminence that overlooked the field of operations, Condy at last took in the entire situation at a glance, and, with the force and precision of a machine, marched his forces straight to the goal he had set for himself so long a time before.

Then at length he took a fresh penful of ink, squared his elbows, drew closer to the desk, and with a single swift spurt of the pen wrote the last line of his novel, dropping the pen upon the instant and pressing the blotter over the words as though setting a seal of approval upon the completed task.

"There!" he muttered, between his teeth; "I've done for *you!*"

That same afternoon he read the last chapter to Blix, and she helped him to prepare the manuscript for expressage. She insisted that it should go off that very day, and herself wrote the directions upon the outside wrapper. Then the two went down together to the Wells Fargo office, and "In Defiance of Authority" was sent on its journey across the continent.

"Now," she said, as they came out of the express office and stood for a moment upon the steps, "now there's nothing to do but wait for the Centennial Company. I do so hope we'll get their answer before I go away. They *ought* to take it. It's just what they asked for. Don't you think they'll take it, Condy?"

"Oh, bother that!" answered Condy. "I don't care whether they take it or not. How long now is it before you go, Blix?"

XIII

A WEEK passed; then another. The year was coming to a close. In ten days Blix would be gone. Letters had been received from Aunt Kihm, and also an exquisite black leather traveling-case, a present to her niece, full of cut-glass bottles, ebony-backed brushes, and shell combs. Blix was to leave on the second day of January. In the meanwhile she had been reading far into her first-year text-books, underscoring and annotating, studying for hours upon such subjects as she did not understand, so that she might get hold of her work the readier when it came to class-room routine and lectures. Hers was a temperament admirably suited to the study she had chosen—self-reliant, cool, and robust.

But it was not easy for her to go. Never before had Blix been away from her home; never for longer than a week had she been separated from her father, nor from Howard and Snooky. That huge city upon the Atlantic seaboard, with its vast, fierce life, where beat the heart of the nation, and where beyond Aunt Kihm she knew no friend, filled Blix with a vague sense of terror and of

oppression. She was going out into a new life, a life of work and of study, a harsher life than she had yet known. Her father, her friends, her home—all these were to be left behind. It was not surprising that Blix should be daunted at the prospect of so great a change in her life, now so close at hand. But if the tears did start at times, no one ever saw them fall, and with a courage that was all her own Blix watched the last days of the year trooping past, and the approach of the New Year that was to begin the new life.

But Condy was thoroughly unhappy. Those wonderful three months were at an end. Blix was going. In less than a week now she would be gone. He would see the last of her. Then what? He pictured himself—when he had said good-by to her and the train had lessened to a smoky blur in the distance—facing about, facing the life that must then begin for him, returning to the city alone, picking up the routine again. There would be nothing to look forward to then; he would not see Blix in the afternoon; would not sit with her in the evening in the little dining-room of the flat overlooking the city and the bay; would not wake in the morning with the consciousness that before the sun would set he would see her again, be with her, and hear the sound of her voice. The months that were to follow would be one long ache, one long, harsh, colorless grind without her. How was he to get through that first evening that he must pass alone? And she did not care for him. Condy at last knew this to be so. Even the poor solace of knowing that she, too, was unhappy was denied him. She had never loved him, and never would. He was a chum to her, nothing more. Condy was too clear-headed to deceive himself upon this point. The time was come for her to go away, and she had given him no sign, no cue.

The last days passed; Blix's trunk was packed, her half section engaged, her ticket bought. They said good-by to the old places they had come to know so well—Chinatown, the Golden Balcony, the water-front, the lake of San Andreas, Telegraph Hill, and Luna's—and had bade farewell to Riccardo and to old Richardson. They had left K. D. B. and Captain Jack until the last day. Blix was to go on the second of January. On New Year's Day she and Condy were to take their last walk, were to go out to the lifeboat station, and then on around the shore to the little amphitheatre of blackberry bushes—where they had promised always to write one another on the anniversary of their first visit—and then for the last time climb the hill, and go across the breezy downs to the city.

Then came the last day of the old year, the last day but one that they would be together. They spent it in a long ramble along the water-front, following the line of the shipping even as far as Meiggs's Wharf. They had come back to the flat for supper, and afterward, as soon as the family had left them alone, had settled themselves in the bay window to watch the New Year in.

The little dining-room was dark, but for the indistinct blur of light that came in through the window—a light that was a mingling of the afterglow, the new-risen moon, and the faint haze that the city threw off into the sky from its street lamps and electrics. From where they sat they could look down, almost as from a tower, into the city's streets. Here a corner came into view; further on a great puff of green foliage—palms and pines side by side—overlooked a wall. Here a street was visible for almost its entire length, like a stream of asphalt flowing down the pitch of the hill, dammed on either side by rows upon rows of houses; while further on the vague confusion of roofs and façades opened out around a patch of green lawn, the garden of some larger residence.

As they looked and watched, the afterglow caught window after window, till all that quarter of the city seemed to stare up at them from a thousand ruddy eyes. The windows seemed infinite in number, the streets endless in their complications; yet everything was deserted. At this hour the streets were empty, and would remain so until daylight. Not a soul was stirring; no face looked from any of those myriads of glowing windows; no footfall disturbed the silence of those asphalt streets. There, almost within call behind those windows, shut off from those empty streets, a thousand human lives were teeming, each the centre of its own circle of thoughts and words and actions; and yet the solitude was profound, the desolation complete, the stillness unbroken by a single echo.

The night—the last night of the old year—was fine; the white, clear light from a moon they could not see grew wide and clear over the city, as the last gleam of the sunset faded. It was just warm enough for the window to be open, and for nearly three hours Condy and Blix sat looking down upon the city in these last moments of the passing year, feeling upon their faces an occasional touch of the breeze, that carried with it the smell of trees and flowers from the gardens below them, and the faint, fine taint of the ocean from far out beyond the Heads. But the scene was not in reality silent. At times when they listened intently, especially when they closed their

eyes, there came to them a subdued, steady bourdon, profound, unceasing, a vast, numb murmur, like no other sound in all the gamut of nature—the sound of a city at night, the hum of a great, conglomerate life, wrought out there from moment to moment under the stars and under the moon, while the last hours of the old year dropped quietly away.

A star fell.

Sitting in the window, the two noticed it at once, and Condy stirred for the first time in fifteen minutes.

"That was a very long one," he said, in a low voice. "Blix, you must write to me—we must write each other often."

"Oh, yes," she answered. "We must not forget each other; we have had too good a time for that."

"Four years is a long time," he went on. "Lots can happen in four years. Wonder what I'll be doing at the end of four years? We've had a pleasant time while it lasted, Blix."

"Haven't we?" she said, her chin on her hand, the moonlight shining in her little, dark-brown eyes.

Well, he was going to lose her. He had found out that he loved her only in time to feel the wrench of parting from her all the more keenly. What was he to do with himself after she was gone? What could he turn to in order to fill up the great emptiness that her going would leave in his daily life? And was she never to know how dear she was to him? Why not speak to her, why not tell her that he loved her? But Condy knew that Blix did not love him, and the knowledge of that must keep him silent; he must hug his secret to him, like the Spartan boy with his stolen fox, no matter how grievously it hurt him to do so. He and Blix had lived through two months of rarest, most untroubled happiness, with hardly more self-consciousness than two young and healthy boys. To bring that troublous, disquieting element of love between them—unrequited love, of all things—would be a folly. She would tell him—must in all honesty tell him that she did not love him, and all their delicious *camaraderie* would end in a "scene." Condy, above everything, wished to look back on those two months, after she had gone, without being able to remember therein one single note that jarred. If the memory of her was all that he was to have, he resolved that at least that memory should be perfect.

And the love of her had made a man of him—he could not forget that; had given to him just the strength that made it possible for him to keep that resolute, grim silence now. In those two

months he had grown five years; he was more masculine, more virile. The very set of his mouth was different; between the eyebrows the cleft had deepened; his voice itself vibrated to a heavier note. No, no; so long as he should live, he, man grown as he was, could never forget this girl of nineteen who had come into his life so quietly, so unexpectedly, who had influenced it so irresistibly and so unmistakably for its betterment, and who had passed out of it with the passing of the year.

For a few moments Condy had been absent-mindedly snapping the lid of his cigarette case, while he thought; now he selected a cigarette, returned the case to his pocket, and fumbled for a match. But the little gun-metal case he carried was empty. Blix rose and groped for a moment upon the mantel-shelf, then returned and handed him a match, and stood over him while he scraped it under the arm of the chair wherein he sat. Even when his cigarette was lighted she still stood there, looking at him, the fingers of her hands clasped in front of her, her hair, one side of her cheek, her chin, and sweet, round neck outlined by the faint blur of light that came from the open window. Then quietly she said:

"Well, Condy?"

"Well, Blix?"

"Just 'well'?" she repeated. "Is that all? Is that all you have to say to me?"

He gave a great start.

"Blix!" he exclaimed.

"Is that all? And you are going to let me go away from you for so long, and say nothing more than that to me? You think you have been so careful, think you have kept your secret so close! Condy, don't you suppose I know? Do you suppose women are so blind? No, you don't need to tell me; I know—I've known it—oh, for weeks!"

"You know—know—know what?" he exclaimed, breathless.

"That you have been pretending that you did not love me. I know that you do love me—I know you have been trying to keep it from me for fear it would spoil our good times, and because we had made up our minds to be chums, and have 'no more foolishness.' Once—in those days when we first knew each other—I knew you did not love me when you said you did; but now, since—oh, since that afternoon in the Chinese restaurant, remember?—I've known that you did love me, although you pretended you didn't. It was the pretence I wanted to be rid of; I wanted to be rid of it when

you said you loved me and didn't, and I want to be rid of it now when *you* pretend not to love me and I *know* you do," and Blix leaned back her head as she spoke that "know," looking at him from under her lids, a smile upon her lips. "It's the pretence that I won't have," she added. "We must be sincere with each other, you and I."

"Blix, do *you* love *me?*"

Condy had risen to his feet, his breath was coming quick, his cigarette was flung away, and his hands opened and shut swiftly.

"Oh, Blixy, little girl, do *you* love *me?*"

They stood there for a moment in the half dark, facing one another, their hearts beating, their breath failing them in the tension of the instant. There in that room, high above the city, a little climax had come swiftly to a head, a crisis in two lives had suddenly developed. The moment that had been in preparation for the last few months, the last few years, the last few centuries, behold! it had arrived.

"Blix, do you love me?"

Suddenly it was the New Year. Somewhere close at hand a chorus of chiming church bells sang together. Far off in the direction of the wharves, where the great ocean steamships lay, came the glad, sonorous shouting of a whistle; from a nearby street a bugle called aloud. And then from point to point, from street to roof top, and from roof to spire, the vague murmur of many sounds grew and spread and widened, slowly, grandly; that profound and steady bourdon, as of an invisible organ swelling, deepening, and expanding to the full male diapason of the city aroused and signaling the advent of another year.

And they heard it, they two heard it, standing there face to face, looking into each other's eyes, that unanswered question yet between them, the question that had come to them with the turning of the year. It was the old year yet when Condy had asked that question. In that moment's pause, while Blix hesitated to answer him, the New Year had come. And while the huge, vast note of the city swelled and vibrated, she still kept silent. But only for a moment. Then she came closer to him, and put a hand on each of his shoulders.

"Happy New Year, dear," she said.

. . . . . .

On New Year's Day, the last day they were to be together, Blix and Condy took "their walk," as they had come to call it—the walk

that included the lifeboat station, the Golden Gate, the ocean beach beyond the old fort, the green, bare, flower-starred hills and downs, and the smooth levels of the golf links. Blix had been busy with the last details of her packing, and they did not get started until toward two in the afternoon.

"Strike me!" exclaimed Captain Jack, as Blix informed him that she had come to say good-by. "Why, ain't this very sudden-like, Miss Bessemer? Hey, Kitty, come in here. Here's Miss Bessemer come to say good-by; going to New York to-morrow."

"We'll regularly be lonesome without you, miss," said K. D. B., as she came into the front room, bringing with her a brisk, pungent odor of boiled vegetables. "New York—such a town as it must be! It was called Manhattan at first, you know, and was settled by the Dutch."

Evidently K. D. B. had reached the N's.

With such deftness as she possessed, Blix tried to turn the conversation upon the first meeting of the retired sea captain and the one-time costume reader, but all to no purpose. The "Matrimonial Objects" were perhaps a little ashamed of their "personals" by now, and neither Blix nor Condy were ever to hear their version of the meeting in the back dining-room of Luna's Mexican restaurant. Captain Jack was, in fact, anxious to change the subject.

"Any news of the yarn yet?" he suddenly inquired of Condy. "What do those Eastern publishin' people think of Our Mug and Billy Isham and the whiskey schooner?"

Condy had received the rejected manuscript of "In Defiance of Authority" that morning, accompanied by a letter from the Centennial Company.

"Well," he said in answer, "they're not, as you might say, falling over themselves trying to see who'll be the first to print it. It's been returned."

"The devil you say!" responded the Captain. "Well, that's kind of disappointin' to you, ain't it?"

"But," Blix hastened to add, "we're not at all discouraged. We're going to send it off again right away."

Then she said good-by to them.

"I dunno as you'll see me here when you come back, miss," said the Captain, at the gate, his arm around K. D. B. "I've got to schemin' again. Do you know," he added, in a low, confidential tone, "that all the mines in California send their clean-ups and gold bricks down to the Selby smeltin' works once every week? They

send 'em to San Francisco first, and they are taken up to Selby's Wednesday afternoons on a little stern-wheel steamer called the "Monticello." All them bricks are in a box—dumped in like so much coal—and that box sets just under the wheel-house, for'ard. How much money do you suppose them bricks represent? Well, I'll tell you; last week they represented seven hundred and eighty thousand dollars. Well, now, I got a chart of the bay near Vallejo; the channel's all right, but there are mudflats that run out from shore three miles. Enough water for a whitehall, but not enough for—well, for the patrol boat, for instance. Two or three slick boys, of a foggy night—of course, I'm not in that kind of game, but strike! it would be a deal now, wouldn't it?"

"Don't you believe him, miss," put in K. D. B. "He's just talking to show off."

"I think your scheme of holding up a Cunard liner," said Condy, with great earnestness, "is more feasible. You could lay across her course and fly a distress signal. She'd have to heave to."

"Yes, I been thinkin' o' that; but look here—what's to prevent the liner taking right after your schooner after you've got the stuff aboard—just followin' you right around an' findin' out where you land?"

"She'd be under contract to carry Government mails," contradicted Condy. "She couldn't do that. You'd leave her mails aboard for just that reason. You wouldn't rob her of her mails; just so long as she was carrying government mails she couldn't stop."

The Captain clapped his palm down upon the gate-post.

"Strike me straight! I never thought of that."

XIV

Blix and Condy went on; on along the narrow road upon the edge of the salt marshes and *tules* that lay between the station and the Golden Gate; on to the Golden Gate itself, and around the old grime-incrusted fort to the ocean shore, with its reaches of hard, white sand, where the bowlders lay tumbled and the surf grumbled incessantly.

The world seemed very far away from them here on the shores of the Pacific, on that first afternoon of the New Year. They were supremely happy, and they sufficed to themselves. Condy had forgotten all about the next day, when he must say good-by to Blix.

It did not seem possible, it was not within the bounds of possibility, that she was to go away—that they two were to be separated. And for that matter, to-morrow was to-morrow. It was twenty-four hours away. The present moment was sufficient.

The persistence with which they clung to the immediate moment, their happiness in living only in the present, had brought about a rather curious condition of things between them.

In their love for each other there was no thought of marriage; they were too much occupied with the joy of being together at that particular instant to think of the future. They loved each other, and that was enough. They did not look ahead further than the following day, and then but furtively, and only in order that their morrow's parting might intensify their happiness of to-day. That New Year's Day was to be the end of everything. Blix was going; she and Condy would never see each other again. The thought of marriage—with its certain responsibilities, its duties, its gravity, its vague, troublous seriousness, its inevitable disappointments—was even a little distasteful to them. Their romance had been hitherto without a flaw; they had been genuinely happy in little things. It was as well that it should end that day, in all its pristine sweetness, unsullied by a single bitter moment, undimmed by the cloud of a single disillusion or disappointment. Whatever chanced to them in later years, they could at least cherish this one memory of a pure, unselfish affection, young and unstained and almost without thought of sex, come and gone on the very threshold of their lives. This was the end, they both understood. They were glad that it was to be so. They did not even speak again of writing to each other.

They found once more the little semicircle of blackberry bushes and the fallen log, half-way up the hill above the shore, and sat there a while, looking down upon the long green rollers, marching incessantly toward the beach, and there breaking in a prolonged explosion of solid green water and flying spume. And their glance followed their succeeding ranks further and further out to sea, till the multitude blended into the mass—the vast, green, shifting mass that drew the eye on and on, to the abrupt, fine line of the horizon.

There was no detail in the scene. There was nothing but the great reach of the ocean floor, the unbroken plane of blue sky, and the bare green slope of land—three immensities, gigantic, vast, primordial. It was no place for trival ideas and thoughts of little things. The mind harked back unconsciously to the broad, simpler, basic emotions, the fundamental instincts of the race. The huge spaces

of earth and air and water carried with them a feeling of kindly but enormous force—elemental force, fresh, untutored, new, and young. There was buoyancy in it; a fine, breathless sense of uplifting and exhilaration: a sensation as of bigness and a return to the homely, human, natural life, to the primitive old impulses, irresistible, changeless, and unhampered; old as the ocean, stable as the hills, vast as the unplumbed depths of the sky.

Condy and Blix sat still, listening, looking, and watching—the intellect drowsy and numb; the emotions, the senses, all alive and brimming to the surface. Vaguely they felt the influence of the moment. Something was preparing for them. From the lowest, untouched depths in the hearts of each of them something was rising steadily to consciousness and the light of day. There is no name for such things, no name for the mystery that spans the interval between man and woman—the mystery that bears no relation to their love for each other, but that is something better than love, and whose coming savors of the miraculous.

The afternoon had waned and the sun had begun to set when Blix rose.

"We should be going, Condy," she told him.

They started up the hill, and Condy said: "I feel as though I had been somehow asleep with my eyes wide open. What a glorious sunset! It seems to me as though I were living double every minute; and oh! Blix, isn't it the greatest thing in the world to love each other as we do?"

They had come to the top of the hill by now, and went on across the open, breezy downs, all starred with blue iris and wild heliotrope. Blix drew his arm about her waist, and laid her cheek upon his shoulder with a little caressing motion.

"And I do love you, dear," she said—"love you with all my heart. And it's for always, too; I know that. I've been a girl until within the last three or four days—just a girl, dearest; not very serious, I'm afraid, and not caring for anything else beyond what was happening close around me—don't you understand? But since I've found out how much I loved you and knew that you loved me—why, everything is changed for me. I'm not the same, I enjoy things that I never thought of enjoying before, and I feel so—oh, *larger*, don't you know?—and stronger, and so much more serious. Just a little while ago I was only nineteen, but I think, dear, that by loving you I have become—all of a sudden and without knowing it—a woman."

A little trembling ran through her with the words. She stopped and put both arms around his neck, her head tipped back, her eyes half closed, her sweet yellow hair rolling from her forehead. Her whole dear being radiated with that sweet, clean perfume that seemed to come alike from her clothes, her neck, her arms, her hair, and mouth—the delicious, almost divine, feminine aroma that was part of herself.

"You do love me, Condy, don't you, just as I love you?"

Such words as he could think of seemed pitifully inadequate. For answer he could only hold her the closer. She understood. Her eyes closed slowly, and her face drew nearer to his. Just above a whisper, she said:

"I love you, dear!"

"I love you, Blix!"

And they kissed each other then upon the mouth.

Meanwhile the sun had been setting. Such a sunset! The whole world, the three great spaces of sea and land and sky, were incarnadined with the glory of it. The ocean floor was a blinding red radiance, the hills were amethyst, the sky one gigantic opal, and they two seemed poised in the midst of all the chaotic glory of a primitive world. It was New Year's Day; the earth was new, the year was new, and their love was new and strong. Everything was before them. There was no longer any past, no longer any present. Regrets and memories had no place in their new world. It was Hope, Hope, Hope, that sang to them and called to them and smote into life the new keen blood of them.

Then suddenly came the miracle, like the flashing out of a new star, whose radiance they felt but could not see, like a burst of music whose harmony they felt but could not hear. And as they stood there alone in all that simple glory of sky and earth and sea, they knew all in an instant that *they were for each other*, forever and forever, for better or for worse, till death should them part. Into their romance, into their world of little things, their joys of the moment, their happiness of the hour, had suddenly descended a great and lasting joy, the happiness of the great, grave issues of life—a happiness so deep, so intense, as to thrill them with a sense of solemnity and wonder. Instead of being the end, that New Year's Day was but the beginning—the beginning of their real romance. All the fine, virile, masculine energy of him was aroused and rampant. All her sweet, strong womanliness had been suddenly deepened and broadened. In fine, he had become a man, and she a

woman. Youth, life, and the love of man and woman, the strength of the hills, the depth of the ocean, and the beauty of the sky at sunset; that was what the New Year had brought to them.

. . . . . .

"It's good-by, dear, isn't it?" said Blix.

But Condy would not have it so.

"No, no," he told her; "no, Blix; no matter how often we separate after this wonderful New Year's Day, no matter how far we are apart, *we* two shall never, never say good-by."

"Oh, you're right, you're right!" she answered, the tears beginning to shine in her little dark-brown eyes. "No; so long as we love each other, nothing matters. There's no such thing as distance for us, is there? Just think, you will be here on the shores of the Pacific, and I on the shores of the Atlantic, but the whole continent can't come between *us*."

"And we'll be together again, Blix," he said; "and it won't be very long now. Just give me time—a few years now."

"But so long as we love each other, *time* won't matter either."

"What are the tears for, Blixy?" he asked, pressing his handkerchief to her cheek.

"Because this is the saddest and happiest day of my life," she answered. Then she pulled from him with a little laugh, adding: "Look, Condy, you've dropped your letter. You pulled it out just now with your handkerchief."

As Condy picked it up, she noted the name of the Centennial Company upon the corner.

"It's the letter I got with the manuscript of the novel when they sent it back," he explained.

"What did they say?"

"Oh, the usual thing. I haven't read it yet. Here's what they say." He opened it and read:

"We return to you herewith the MS. of your novel, 'In Defiance of Authority,' and regret that our reader does not recommend it as available for publication at present. We have, however, followed your work with considerable interest, and have read a story by you, copied in one of our exchanges, under the title, 'A Victory Over Death,' which we would have been glad to publish ourselves, had you given us the chance.

"Would you consider the offer of the assistant editorship of our *Quarterly*, a literary and critical pamphlet, that we publish in New York, and with which we presume you are familiar? We do not believe there would

be any difficulty in the matter of financial arrangements. In case you should decide to come on, we inclose R.R. passes *via* the A. T. & S. F., C. & A., and New York Central. "Very truly,

"The Centennial Publishing Company,

"New York."

The two exchanged glances. But Blix was too excited to speak, and could only give vent to a little, quivering, choking sigh. The letter was a veritable god from the machine, the one thing lacking to complete their happiness.

"I don't know how this looks to *you*," Condy began, trying to be calm, "but it seems to me that this is—that this—this—"

But what they said then they could never afterward remember. The golden haze of the sunset somehow got into their recollection of the moment, and they could only recall the fact that they had been gayer in that moment than ever before in all their lives.

Perhaps as gay as they ever were to be again. They began to know the difference between gayety and happiness. That New Year's Day, that sunset, marked for them an end and a beginning. It was the end of their gay, irresponsible, hour-to-hour life of the past three months; and it was the beginning of a new life, whose possibilities of sorrow and of trouble, of pleasure and of happiness, were greater than aught they had yet experienced. They knew this—they felt it instinctively, as with a common impulse they turned and looked back upon the glowing earth and sea and sky, the breaking surf, the beach, the distant, rime-incrusted, ancient fort—all that scene that to their eyes stood for the dear, free, careless companionship of those last few months. Their new-found happiness was not without its sadness already. All was over now; their solitary walks, the long, still evenings in the little dining-room overlooking the sleeping city, their excursions to Luna's, their afternoons spent in the golden Chinese balcony, their mornings on the lake, calm and still and hot. Forever and forever they had said good-by to that life. Already the sunset was losing its glory.

Then, with one last look, they turned about and set their faces from it to the new life, to the East, where lay the Nation. Out beyond the purple bulwarks of the Sierras, far off, the great, grim world went clashing through its grooves—the world that now they were to know, the world that called to them, and woke them, and roused them. Their little gayeties were done; the life of little things was all behind. Now for the future. The sterner note had

struck—work was to be done; that, too, the New Year had brought to them—work for each of them, work and the world of men.

For a moment they shrank from it, loth to take the first step beyond the confines of the garden wherein they had lived so joyously and learned to love each other; and as they stood there, facing the gray and darkening Eastern sky, their backs forever turned to the sunset, Blix drew closer to him, putting her hand in his, looking a little timidly into his eyes. But his arm was around her, and the strong young force that looked into her eyes from his gave her courage.

"A happy New Year, dear," she said.

"A very, very happy New Year, Blix," he answered.

THE END

Moran of the Lady Letty

A STORY OF ADVENTURE
OFF THE CALIFORNIA COAST

BY

FRANK NORRIS

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S. S. McClure Company

DEDICATED TO

Captain Joseph Hodgson

UNITED STATES LIFE SAVING SERVICE

MORAN OF THE LADY LETTY

I

SHANGHAIED

THIS is to be a story of a battle, at least one murder, and several sudden deaths. For that reason it begins with a pink tea and among the mingled odors of many delicate perfumes and the hale, frank smell of Caroline Testout roses.

There had been a great number of débutantes "coming out" that season in San Francisco by means of afternoon teas, pink, lavender, and otherwise. This particular tea was intended to celebrate the fact that Josie Herrick had arrived at that time of her life when she was to wear her hair high and her gowns long, and to have a "day" of her own quite distinct from that of her mother.

Ross Wilbur presented himself at the Herrick house on Pacific Avenue much too early upon the afternoon of Miss Herrick's tea. As he made his way up the canvased stairs he was aware of a terrifying array of millinery and a disquieting staccato chatter of feminine voices in the parlors and reception-rooms on either side of the hallway. A single high hat in the room that had been set apart for the men's use confirmed him in his suspicions.

"Might have known it would be a hen party till six, anyhow," he muttered, swinging out of his overcoat. "Bet I don't know one girl in twenty down there now—all mamma's friends at this hour, and papa's maiden sisters, and Jo's school-teachers and governesses and music-teachers, and I don't know what all."

When he went down he found it precisely as he expected. He went up to Miss Herrick, where she stood receiving with her mother and two of the other girls, and allowed them to chaff him on his forlornness.

"Maybe I seem at my ease," said Ross Wilbur to them, "but really I am very much frightened. I'm going to run away as soon as it is decently possible, even before, unless you feed me."

"I believe you had luncheon not two hours ago," said Miss Her-

rick. "Come along, though, and I'll give you some chocolate, and perhaps, if you're good, a stuffed olive. I got them just because I knew you liked them. I ought to stay here and receive, so I can't look after you for long."

The two fought their way through the crowded rooms to the luncheon-table, and Miss Herrick got Wilbur his chocolate and his stuffed olives. They sat down and talked in a window recess for a moment, Wilbur toeing-in in absurd fashion as he tried to make a lap for his plate.

"I thought," said Miss Herrick, "that you were going on the Ridgeways' yachting party this afternoon. Mrs. Ridgeway said she was counting on you. They are going out with the 'Petrel.'"

"She didn't count above a hundred, though," answered Wilbur. "I got your bid first, so I regretted the yachting party; and I guess I'd have regretted it anyhow," and he grinned at her over his cup.

"Nice man," she said—adding on the instant, "I must go now, Ross."

"Wait till I eat the sugar out of my cup," complained Wilbur. "Tell me," he added, scraping vigorously at the bottom of the cup with the inadequate spoon; "tell me, you're going to the hoe-down to-night?"

"If you mean the Assembly, yes, I am."

"Will you give me the first and last?"

"I'll give you the first, and you can ask for the last then."

"Let's put it down; I know you'll forget it." Wilbur drew a couple of cards from his case.

"Programmes are not good form any more," said Miss Herrick.

"Forgetting a dance is worse."

He made out the cards, writing on the one he kept for himself, "First waltz—Jo."

"I must go back now," said Miss Herrick, getting up.

"In that case I shall run—I'm afraid of girls."

"It's a pity about you."

"I am; one girl, I don't say, but girl in the aggregate like this," and he pointed his chin toward the thronged parlors. "It unmans me."

"Good-by, then."

"Good-by, until to-night, about—?"

"About nine."

"About nine, then."

Ross Wilbur made his adieu to Mrs. Herrick and the girls who

were receiving, and took himself away. As he came out of the house and stood for a moment on the steps, settling his hat gingerly upon his hair so as not to disturb the parting, he was not by any means an ill-looking chap. His good height was helped out by his long coat and his high silk hat, and there was plenty of jaw in the lower part of his face. Nor was his tailor altogether answerable for his shoulders. Three years before this time Ross Wilbur had pulled at No. 5 in his varsity boat in an Eastern college that was not accustomed to athletic discomfiture.

"I wonder what I'm going to do with myself until supper time," he muttered, as he came down the steps, feeling for the middle of his stick. He found no immediate answer to his question. But the afternoon was fine, and he set off to walk in the direction of the town, with a half-formed idea of looking in at his club.

At his club he found a letter in his box from his particular chum, who had been spending the month shooting elk in Oregon.

"Dear Old Man," it said, "will be back on the afternoon you receive this. Will hit the town on the three o'clock boat. Get seats for the best show going—my treat—and arrange to assimilate nutriment at the Poodle Dog—also mine. I've got miles of talk in me that I've got to reel off before midnight. Yours,

"JERRY.

"I've got a stand of horns for you, Ross, that are Glory Hallelujah."

"Well, I can't go," murmured Wilbur, as he remembered the Assembly that was to come off that night and his engaged dance with Jo Herrick. He decided that it would be best to meet Jerry as he came off the boat and tell him how matters stood. Then he resolved, since no one that he knew was in the club, and the instalment of the Paris weeklies had not arrived, that it would be amusing to go down to the water-front and loaf among the shipping until it was time for Jerry's boat.

Wilbur spent an hour along the wharves, watching the great grain ships consigned to "Cork for orders" slowly gorging themselves with whole harvests of wheat from the San Joaquin Valley; lumber vessels for Durban and South African ports settling lower and lower to the water's level as forests of pine and redwood stratified themselves along their decks and in their holds; coal barges discharging from Nanaimo; busy little tugs coughing

and nuzzling at the flanks of the deep-sea tramps, while hay barges and Italian whitehalls came and went at every turn. A Stockton River boat went by, her stern wheel churning along behind, like a huge net-reel; a tiny maelstrom of activity centred about an Alaska Commercial Company's steamboat that would clear for Dawson in the morning.

No quarter of one of the most picturesque cities in the world had more interest for Wilbur than the water-front. In the mile or so of shipping that stretched from the docks where the China steamships landed, down past the ferry slips and on to Meiggs's Wharf, every maritime nation in the world was represented. More than once Wilbur had talked to the loungers of the wharves, stevedores out of work, sailors between voyages, caulkers and ship chandlers' men looking—not too earnestly—for jobs; so that on this occasion, when a little, undersized fellow in dirty brown sweater and clothes of Barbary coast cut asked him for a match to light his pipe, Wilbur offered a cigar and passed the time of day with him. Wilbur had not forgotten that he himself was dressed for an afternoon function. But the incongruity of the business was precisely what most amused him.

After a time the fellow suggested drinks. Wilbur hesitated for a moment. It would be something to tell about, however, so, "All right, I'll drink with you," he said.

The brown sweater led the way to a sailors' boarding-house hard by. The rear of the place was built upon piles over the water. But in front, on the ground floor, was a barroom.

"Rum an' gum," announced the brown sweater, as the two came in and took their places at the bar.

"Rum an' gum, Tuck; wattle you have, sir?"

"Oh—I don't know," hesitated Wilbur; "give me a mild Manhattan."

While the drinks were being mixed the brown sweater called Wilbur's attention to a fighting head-dress from the Marquesas that was hung on the wall over the free-lunch counter and opposite the bar. Wilbur turned about to look at it, and remained so, his back to the barkeeper, till the latter told them their drinks were ready.

"Well, mate, here's big blocks an' taut hawse-pipes," said the brown sweater cordially.

"Your very good health," returned Wilbur.

The brown sweater wiped a thin mustache in the hollow of his palm, and wiped that palm upon his trouser leg.

"Yessir," he continued, once more facing the Marquesas headdress. "Yessir, they're queer game down there."

"In the Marquesas Islands, you mean?" said Wilbur.

"Yessir, they're queer game. When they ain't tattoin' themselves with Scripture tex's they git from the missionaries, they're pullin' out the hairs all over their bodies with two clam-shells. Hair by hair, y' understan'?"

"Pull'n out 'er hair?" said Wilbur, wondering what was the matter with his tongue.

"They think it's clever—think the women folk like it."

Wilbur had fancied that the little man had worn a brown sweater when they first met. But now, strangely enough, he was not in the least surprised to see it iridescent like a pigeon's breast.

"Y' ever been down that way?" inquired the little man next.

Wilbur heard the words distinctly enough, but somehow they refused to fit into the right places in his brain. He pulled himself together, frowning heavily.

"What—did—you—say?" he asked with great deliberation, biting off his words. Then he noticed that he and his companion were no longer in the barroom, but in a little room back of it. His personality divided itself. There was one Ross Wilbur—who could not make his hands go where he wanted them, who said one word when he thought another, and whose legs below the knee were made of solid lead. Then there was another Ross Wilbur—Ross Wilbur, the alert, who was perfectly clear-headed, and who stood off to one side and watched his twin brother making a monkey of himself, without power and without even the desire of helping him.

This latter Wilbur heard the iridescent sweater say:

"Bust me, if y' a'n't squiffy, old man. Stand by a bit an' we'll have a ball."

"Can't have got—return—exceptionally—and the round table—pull out hairs wi' tu clamsh'ls," gabbled Wilbur's stupefied double; and Wilbur the alert said to himself: "You're not drunk, Ross Wilbur, that's certain; what could they have put in your cocktail?"

The iridescent sweater stamped twice upon the floor and a trapdoor fell away beneath Wilbur's feet like the drop of a gallows. With the eyes of his undrugged self Wilbur had a glimpse of water below. His elbow struck the floor as he went down, and he fell feet first into a Whitehall boat. He had time to observe two men

at the oars and to look between the piles that supported the house above him and catch a glimpse of the bay and a glint of the Contra Costa shore. He was not in the least surprised at what had happened, and made up his mind that it would be a good idea to lie down in the boat and go to sleep.

Suddenly—but how long after his advent into the boat he could not tell—his wits began to return and settle themselves, like wild birds flocking again after a scare. Swiftly he took in the scene. The blue waters of the bay around him, the deck of a schooner on which he stood, the Whitehall boat alongside, and an enormous man with a face like a setting moon wrangling with his friend in the sweater—no longer iridescent.

"What do you call it?" shouted the red man. "I want able seamen—I don't figger on working this boat with dancing masters, do I? We ain't exactly doing quadrilles on my quarterdeck. If we don't look out we'll step on this thing and break it. It ain't ought to be let around loose without its ma."

"Rot that," vociferated the brown sweater. "I tell you he's one of the best sailor men on the front. If he ain't we'll forfeit the money. Come on, Captain Kitchell, we made show enough gettin' away as it was, and this daytime business ain't our line. D'you sign or not? Here's the advance note. I got to duck my nut or I'll have the patrol boat after me."

"I'll sign this once," growled the other, scrawling his name on the note; "but if this swab ain't up to sample, he'll come back by freight, an' I'll drop in on mee dear friend Jim when we come back and give him a reel nice time, an' you can lay to that, Billy Trim." The brown sweater pocketed the note, went over the side, and rowed off.

Wilbur stood in the waist of a schooner anchored in the stream well off Fisherman's wharf. In the forward part of the schooner a Chinaman in brown duck was mixing paint. Wilbur was conscious that he still wore his high hat and long coat, but his stick was gone and one gray glove was slit to the button. In front of him towered the enormous red-faced man. A pungent reek of some kind of rancid fat or oil assailed his nostrils. Over by Alcatraz a ferry-boat whistled for its slip as it elbowed its way through the water.

Wilbur had himself fairly in hand by now. His wits were all about him; but the situation was beyond him as yet.

"Git for'd," commanded the big man.

Wilbur drew himself up, angry in an instant. "Look here," he began, "what's the meaning of this business? I know I've been drugged and mishandled. I demand to be put ashore. Do you understand that?"

"Angel child," whimpered the big man. "Oh, you lilee of the vallee, you bright an' mornin' star. I'm reely pained y'know, that your vally can't come along, but we'll have your piano set up in the lazarette. It gives me genuine grief, it do, to see you bein' obliged to put your lilee white feet on this here vulgar an' dirtee deck. We'll have the Wilton carpet down by to-morrer, so we will, my dear. Yah-h!" he suddenly broke out, as his rage boiled over. "Git for'd, d'ye hear! I'm captain of this here bathtub, an' that's all you need to know for a good while to come. I ain't generally got to tell that to a man but once; but I'll stretch the point just for love of you, angel child. Now, then, move!"

Wilbur stood motionless—puzzled beyond expression. No experience he had ever been through helped in this situation.

"Look here," he began, "I—"

The captain knocked him down with a blow of one enormous fist upon the mouth, and while he was yet stretched upon the deck kicked him savagely in the stomach. Then he allowed him to rise, caught him by the neck and the slack of his overcoat, and ran him forward to where a hatchway, not two feet across, opened in the deck. Without ado, he flung him down into the darkness below; and while Wilbur, dizzied by the fall, sat on the floor at the foot of the vertical companion-ladder, gazing about him with distended eyes, there rained down upon his head, first an oilskin coat, then a sou'wester, a pair of oilskin breeches, woolen socks, and a plug of tobacco. Above him, down the contracted square of the hatch, came the bellowing of the Captain's voice:

"There's your fit-out, Mister Lilee of the Vallee, which the same our dear friend Jim makes a present of and no charge, because he loves you so. You're allowed two minutes to change, an' it is to be hoped as how you won't force me to come for to assist."

It would have been interesting to have followed, step by step, the mental process that now took place in Ross Wilbur's brain. The Captain had given him two minutes in which to change. The time was short enough, but even at that Wilbur changed more than his clothes during the two minutes he was left to himself in the reeking dark of the schooner's fo'castle. It was more than a change

—it was a revolution. What he made up his mind to do—precisely what mental attitude he decided to adopt, just what new niche he elected wherein to set his feet, it is difficult to say. Only by results could the change be guessed at. He went down the forward hatch at the toe of Kitchell's boot—silk-hatted, melton-overcoated, patent-booted, and gloved in suèdes. Two minutes later there emerged upon the deck a figure in oilskins and a sou'wester. There was blood upon the face of him and the grime of an unclean ship upon his bare hands. It was Wilbur, and yet not Wilbur. In two minutes he had been, in a way, born again. The only traces of his former self were the patent-leather boots, still persistent in their gloss and shine, that showed grim incongruity below the vast compass of the oilskin breeches.

As Wilbur came on deck he saw the crew of the schooner hurrying forward, six of them, Chinamen every one, in brown jeans and black felt hats. On the quarterdeck stood the Captain, barking his orders.

"Consider the Lilee of the Vallee," bellowed the latter, as his eye fell upon Wilbur the Transformed. "Clap on to that starboard windlass brake, sonny."

Wilbur saw the Chinamen ranging themselves about what he guessed was the windlass in the schooner's bow. He followed and took his place among them, grasping one of the bars.

"Break down!" came the next order. Wilbur and the Chinamen obeyed, bearing up and down upon the bars till the slack of the anchor-chain came home and stretched taut and dripping from the hawse-holes.

"'Vast heavin'!"

And then as Wilbur released the brake and turned about for the next order, he cast his glance out upon the bay, and there, not a hundred and fifty yards away, her spotless sails tense, her cordage humming, her immaculate flanks slipping easily through the waves, the water hissing and churning under her forefoot, clean, gleaming, dainty, and aristocratic, the Ridgeways' yacht "Petrel" passed like a thing of life. Wilbur saw Nat Ridgeway himself at the wheel. Girls in smart gowns and young fellows in white ducks and yachting caps—all friends of his—crowded the decks. A little orchestra of musicians were reeling off a quickstep.

The popping of a cork and a gale of talk and laughter came to his ears. Wilbur stared at the picture, his face devoid of expression. The "Petrel" came on—drew nearer—was not a hundred

feet away from the schooner's stern. A strong swimmer, such as Wilbur, could cover the distance in a few strides. Two minutes ago Wilbur might have—

"Set your mains'l," came the bellow of Captain Kitchell. "Clap on to your throat and peak halyards."

The Chinamen hurried aft.

Wilbur followed.

II

A NAUTICAL EDUCATION.

In the course of the next few moments, while the little vessel was being got under way, and while the Ridgeways' "Petrel" gleamed off into the blue distance, Wilbur made certain observations.

The name of the boat on which he found himself was the "Bertha Millner." She was a two-topmast, 28-ton keel schooner, 40 feet long, carrying a large spread of sail—mainsail, foresail, jib, flying-jib, two gaff-topsails, and a staysail. She was very dirty and smelt abominably of some kind of rancid oil. Her crew were Chinamen; there was no mate. But the cook—himself a Chinaman—who appeared from time to time at the door of the galley, a potato-masher in his hand, seemed to have some sort of authority over the hands. He acted in a manner as a go-between for the Captain and the crew, sometimes interpreting the former's orders, and occasionally giving one of his own.

Wilbur heard the Captain address him as Charlie. He spoke pigeon English fairly. Of the balance of the crew—the five Chinamen—Wilbur could make nothing. They never spoke, neither to Captain Kitchell, to Charlie, nor to each other; and for all the notice they took of Wilbur he might easily have been a sack of sand. Wilbur felt that his advent on the "Bertha Millner" was by its very nature an extraordinary event; but the absolute indifference of these brown-suited Mongols, the blankness of their flat, fat faces, the dulness of their slanting, fishlike eyes that never met his own or even wandered in his direction, was uncanny, disquieting. In what strange venture was he now to be involved, toward what unknown vortex was this new current setting, this current that had so suddenly snatched him from the solid ground of his accustomed life?

He told himself grimly that he was to have a free cruise up the bay, perhaps as far as Alviso; perhaps the "Bertha Millner" would even make the circuit of the bay before returning to San Francisco. He might be gone a week. Wilbur could already see the scare-

heads of the daily papers the next morning, chronicling the disappearance of "One of Society's Most Popular Members."

"That's well, y'r throat halyards. Here, Lilee of the Vallee, give a couple of pulls on y'r peak halyard purchase."

Wilbur stared at the Captain helplessly.

"No can tell, hey?" inquired Charlie from the galley. "Pullum disa lope, sabe?"

Wilbur tugged at the rope the cook indicated.

"That's well, y'r peak halyard purchase," chanted Captain Kitchell.

Wilbur made the rope fast. The mainsail was set, and hung slatting and flapping in the wind. Next the for'sail was set in much the same manner, and Wilbur was ordered to "lay out on the ji'boom and cast the gaskets off the jib." He "lay out" as best he could and cast off the gaskets—he knew barely enough of yachting to understand an order here and there—and by the time he was back on the fo'c'sle head the Chinamen were at the jib halyard and hoisting away.

"That's well, y'r jib halyards."

The "Bertha Millner" veered round and played off to the wind, tugging at her anchor.

"Man y'r windlass."

Wilbur and the crew jumped once more to the brakes.

"Brake down, heave y'r anchor to the cathead."

The anchor-chain, already taut, vibrated and then cranked through the hawse-holes as the hands rose and fell at the brakes. The anchor came home, dripping gray slime. A nor'west wind filled the schooner's sails, a strong ebb tide caught her underfoot.

"We're off," muttered Wilbur, as the "Bertha Millner" heeled to the first gust.

But evidently the schooner was not bound up the bay.

"Must be Vallejo or Benicia, then," hazarded Wilbur, as the sails grew tenser and the water rippled ever louder under the schooner's forefoot. "Maybe they're going after hay or wheat."

The schooner was tacking, headed directly for Meiggs's wharf. She came in closer and closer, so close that Wilbur could hear the talk of the fishermen sitting on the stringpieces. He had just made up his mind that they were to make a landing there, when—"

"Stand by for stays," came the raucous bark of the Captain, who had taken the wheel. The sails slatted furiously as the schooner

came about. Then the "Bertha Millner" caught the wind again and lay over quietly and contentedly to her work. The next tack brought the schooner close under Alcatraz. The sea became heavier, the breeze grew stiff and smelled of the outside ocean. Out beyond them to westward opened the Golden Gate, a bleak vista of gray-green water roughened with white-caps.

"Stand by for stays."

Once again as the rudder went hard over, the "Bertha Millner" fretted and danced and shook her sails, calling impatiently for the wind, chafing at its absence like a child reft of a toy. Then again she scooped the nor'wester in the hollow palms of her tense canvases and settled quietly down on the new tack, her bowsprit pointing straight toward the Presidio.

"We'll come about again soon," Wilbur told himself, "and stand over toward the Contra Costa shore."

A fine huge breath of wind passed over the schooner. She heeled it on the instant, the water roaring along her quarter, but she kept her course. Wilbur fell thoughtful again, never more keenly observant.

"She must come about soon," he muttered uneasily, "if she's going to stand up toward Vallejo." His heart sank with a sudden apprehension. A nervousness he could not overcome seized upon him. The "Bertha Millner" held tenaciously to the tack. Within fifty yards of the Presidio came the command again:

"Stand by for stays."

Once more, her bows dancing, her cordage rattling, her sails flapping noisily, the schooner came about. Anxiously Wilbur observed the bowsprit as it circled like a hand on a dial, watching where now it would point. It wavered, fluctuated, rose, fell, then settled easily, pointing toward Lime Point. Wilbur felt a sudden coldness at his heart.

"This isn't going to be so much fun," he muttered between his teeth. The schooner was not bound up the bay for Alviso nor to Vallejo for grain. The track toward Lime Point could mean but one thing. The wind was freshening from the nor'west, the ebb tide rushing out to meet the ocean like a mill-race, at every moment the Golden Gate opened out wider, and within two minutes after the time of the last tack the "Bertha Millner" heeled to a great gust that had come booming in between the heads, straight from the open Pacific.

"Stand by for stays."

As before, one of the Chinese hands stood by the sail rope of the jib.

"Draw y'r jib."

The jib filled. The schooner came about on the port tack; Lime Point fell away over the stern rail. The huge ground swells began to come in, and as she rose and bowed to the first of these it was precisely as though the "Bertha Millner" were making her courtesy to the great gray ocean, now for the first time in full sight on her starboard quarter.

The schooner was beating out to sea through the Middle Channel. Once clear of the Golden Gate, she stood over toward the Cliff House, then on the next tack cleared Point Bonita. The sea began building up in deadly earnest—they were about to cross the bar. Everything was battened down, the scuppers were awash, and the hawse-holes spouted like fountains after every plunge. Once the Captain ordered all men aloft, just in time to escape a gigantic dull green roller that broke like a Niagara over the schooner's bows, smothering the decks knee-deep in a twinkling.

The wind blew violent and cold, the spray was flying like icy small-shot. Without intermission the "Bertha Millner" rolled and plunged and heaved and sank. Wilbur was drenched to the skin and sore in every joint, from being shunted from rail to mast and from mast to rail again. The cordage sang like harp-strings, the schooner's forefoot crushed down into the heaving water with a hissing like that of steam, blocks rattled, the Captain bellowed his orders, rope-ends flogged the hollow deck till it reverberated like a drum-head. The crossing of the bar was one long half-hour of confusion and discordant sound.

When they were across the bar the Captain ordered the cook to give the men their food.

"Git for'rd, sonny," he added, fixing Wilbur with his eye. "Git for'rd, this is tawble dee hote, savvy?"

Wilbur crawled forward on the reeling deck, holding on now to a mast, now to a belaying-pin, now to a stay, watching his chance and going on between the inebriated plunges of the schooner.

He descended the fo'c'sle hatch. The Chinamen were already there, sitting on the edges of their bunks. On the floor, at the bottom of the ladder, punk-sticks were burning in an old tomato-can.

Charlie brought in supper—stewed beef and pork in a bread-pan and a wooden kit—and the Chinamen ate in silence with their sheath-knives and from tin plates. A liquid that bore a distant re-

semblance to coffee was served. Wilbur learned afterward to know the stuff as Black Jack, and to be aware that it was made from bud barley and was sweetened with molasses. A single reeking lamp swung with the swinging of the schooner over the centre of the group, and long after Wilbur could remember the grisly scene—the punk-sticks, the bread-pan full of hunks of meat, the horrid close and oily smell, and the circle of silent, preoccupied Chinese, each sitting on his bunk-ledge, devouring stewed pork and holding his pannikin of Black Jack between his feet against the rolling of the boat.

Wilbur looked fearfully at the mess in the pan, recalling the chocolate and stuffed olives that had been his last luncheon.

"Well," he muttered, clinching his teeth, "I've got to come to it sooner or later." His penknife was in the pocket of his waistcoat, underneath his oilskin coat. He opened the big blade, harpooned a cube of pork, and deposited it on his tin plate. He ate it slowly and with savage determination. But the Black Jack was more than he could bear.

"I'm not hungry enough for that just now," he told himself. "Say, Jim," he said, turning to the Chinaman next him on the bunk-ledge, "say, what kind of boat is this? What you do—where you go?"

The other moved away impatiently.

"No sabe, no sabe," he answered, shaking his head and frowning. Throughout the whole of that strange meal these were the only words spoken.

When Wilbur came on deck again he noted that the "Bertha Millner" had already left the whistling-buoy astern. Off to the east, her sails just showing above the waves, was a pilot-boat with the number 7 on her mainsail. The evening was closing in; the Farallones were in plain sight dead ahead. Far behind, in a mass of shadow just bluer than the sky, he could make out a few twinkling lights—San Francisco.

Half an hour later Kitchell came on deck from his supper in the cabin aft. He glanced in the direction of the mainland, now almost out of sight, then took the wheel from one of the Chinamen and commanded, "Ease off y'r fore an' main sheets." The hands eased away and the schooner played off before the wind.

The staysail was set. The "Bertha Millner" headed to southwest, bowling easily ahead of a good eight-knot breeze.

Next came the order "All hands aft!" and Wilbur and his mates

betook themselves to the quarterdeck. Charlie took the wheel, and he and Kitchell began to choose the men for their watches, just as Wilbur remembered to have chosen sides for baseball during his school days.

"Sonny, I'll choose you; you're on my watch," said the Captain to Wilbur, "and I will assoom the ree-sponsibility of your nautical eddoocation."

"I may as well tell you at once," began Wilbur, "that I'm no sailor."

"But you will be, soon," answered the Captain, at once soothing and threatening; "you will be, Mister Lilee of the Vallee, you kin lay to it as how you will be one of the best sailormen along the front, as our dear friend Jim says. Before I git throo with you, you'll be a sailorman or shark-bait, I can promise you. You're on my watch; step over here, son."

The watches were divided, Charlie and three other Chinamen on the port, Kitchell, Wilbur, and two Chinamen on the starboard. The men trooped forward again.

The tiny world of the schooner had lapsed to quiet. The "Bertha Millner" was now clear of the land, that lay like a blur of faintest purple smoke—ever growing fainter—low in the east. The Farallones showed but their shoulders above the horizon. The schooner was standing well out from shore—even beyond the track of the coasters and passenger steamers—to catch the Trades from the northwest. The sun was setting royally, and the floor of the ocean shimmered like mosaic. The sea had gone down and the fury of the bar was a thing forgotten. It was perceptibly warmer.

On board, the two watches mingled forward, smoking opium and playing a game that looked like checkers. Three of them were washing down the decks with kaiar brooms. For the first time since he had come on board Wilbur heard the sound of their voices.

The evening was magnificent. Never to Wilbur's eyes had the Pacific appeared so vast, so radiant, so divinely beautiful. A star or two burned slowly through that part of the sky where the pink began to fade into the blue. Charlie went forward and set the side lights—red on the port rigging, green on the starboard. As he passed Wilbur, who was leaning over the rail and watching the phosphorus flashing just under the surface, he said:

"Hey, you go talkee-talk one-piecey Boss, savvy Boss—chin-chin."

Wilbur went aft and came up on the poop, where Kitchell stood at the wheel, smoking an inverted "Tarrier's Delight."

"Now, son," began Kitchell, "I natch'ly love you so that I'm goin' to do you a reel favor, do you twig? I'm goin' to allow you to berth aft in the cabin, 'long o' me an' Charlie, an' beesides you can make free of my quarterdeck. Mebbee you ain't used to the ways of sailormen just yet, but you can lay to it that those two are reel concessions, savvy? I ain't a mush-head, like mee dear friend Jim. You ain't no water-front swine, I can guess that with one hand tied beehind me. You're a toff, that's what you are, and your lines has been laid for toffs. I ain't askin' you no questions, but you got brains, an' I figger on gettin' more outa you by lettin' you have y'r head a bit. But mind, now, you get gay once, sonny, or try to flimflam me, or forget that I'm the boss of the bathtub, an' strike me blind, I'll cut you open, an' you can lay to that, son. Now, then, here's the game: You work this boat 'long with the coolies, an' take my orders, an' walk chalk, an' I'll teach you navigation, an' make this cruise as easy as how-do-you-do. You don't, an' I'll manhandle you till y'r bones come throo y'r hide."

"I've no choice in the matter," said Wilbur. "I've got to make the best of a bad situation."

"I ree-marked as how you had brains," muttered the Captain.

"But there's one thing," continued Wilbur; "if I'm to have my head a little, as you say, you'll find we can get along better if you put me to rights about this whole business. Why was I brought aboard, why are there only Chinese along, where are we going, what are we going to do, and how long are we going to be gone?"

Kitchell spat over the side, and then sucked the nicotine from his mustache.

"Well," he said, resuming his pipe, "it's like this, son. This ship belongs to one of the Six Chinese Companies of Chinatown in Frisco. Charlie, here, is one of the shareholders in the business. We go down here twice a year off Cape Sain' Lucas, Lower California, an' fish for blue sharks, or white, if we kin ketch 'em. We get the livers of these an' try out the oil, an' we bring back that same oil, an' the Chinamen sell it all over San Francisco as simon-pure cod-liver oil, savvy? An' it pays like a nitrate bed. I come in because it's a Custom-house regulation that no coolie can take a boat out of Frisco."

"And how do I come in?" asked Wilbur.

"Mee dear friend Jim put a knock-me-out drop into your Man-

hattan cocktail. It's a capsule filled with a drug. You were shanghaied, son," said the Captain, blandly.

. . . . . .

About an hour later Wilbur turned in. Kitchell showed him his bunk with its "donkey's breakfast" and single ill-smelling blanket. It was located under the companionway that led down into the cabin. Kitchell bunked on one side, Charlie on the other. A hacked deal table, covered with oilcloth and ironed to the floor, a swinging-lamp, two chairs, a rack of books, a chest or two, and a flaring picture cut from the advertisement of a ballet, was the room's inventory in the matter of furniture and ornament.

Wilbur sat on the edge of his bunk before undressing, reviewing the extraordinary events of the day. In a moment he was aware of a movement in one of the other two bunks, and presently made out Charlie lying on his side and holding in the flame of an alcohol lamp a skewer on which some brown and sticky stuff boiled and sizzled. He transformed the stuff to the bowl of a huge pipe and drew on it noisily once or twice. In another moment he had sunk back in his bunk, nearly senseless, but with a long breath of an almost blissful contentment.

"Beast!" muttered Wilbur, with profound disgust.

He threw off his oilskin coat and felt in the pocket of his waistcoat (which he had retained when he had changed his clothes in the fo'c'sle) for his watch. He drew it out. It was just nine o'clock. All at once an idea occurred to him. He fumbled in another pocket of the waistcoat and brought out one of his calling-cards.

For a moment Wilbur remained motionless, seated on the bunk-ledge, smiling grimly, while his glance wandered now to the sordid cabin of the "Bertha Millner" and the opium-drugged coolie sprawled on the "donkey's breakfast," and now to the card in his hand on which a few hours ago he had written:

"First waltz—Jo."

III

THE LADY LETTY

ANOTHER day passed, then two. Before Wilbur knew it he had settled himself to his new life, and woke one morning to the realization that he was positively enjoying himself. Daily the weather grew warmer. The fifth day out from San Francisco it was actually hot. The pitch grew soft in the "Bertha Millner's" deck seams, the masts sweated resin. The Chinamen went about the decks wearing but their jeans and blouses. Kitchell had long since abandoned his coat and vest. Wilbur's oilskins became intolerable, and he was at last constrained to trade his pocket-knife to Charlie for a suit of jeans and wicker sandals, such as the coolies wore—and odd enough he looked in them.

The Captain instructed him in steering, and even promised to show him the use of the sextant and how to take an observation in the fake short and easy coasting style of navigation. Furthermore, he showed him how to read the log and the manner of keeping the dead reckoning.

During most of his watches Wilbur was engaged in painting the inside of the cabin, door panels, lintels, and the few scattered moldings; and toward the middle of the first week out, when the "Bertha Millner" was in the latitude of Point Conception, he and three Chinamen, under Kitchell's directions, ratlined down the forerigging and affixed the crow's nest upon the for'mast. The next morning, during Charlie's watch on deck, a Chinaman was sent up into the crow's nest, and from that time on there was always a lookout maintained from the masthead.

More than once Wilbur looked around him at the empty coruscating indigo of the ocean floor, wondering at the necessity of the lookout, and finally expressed his curiosity to Kitchell. The Captain had now taken not a little to Wilbur; at first for the sake of a white man's company, and afterward because he began to place a certain vague reliance upon Wilbur's judgment. Kitchell had remarked as how he had brains.

"Well, you see, son," Kitchell had explained to Wilbur, "os-ten-

siblee we are after shark-liver oil—and so we are; but also we are on any lay that turns up; ready for any game, from wrecking to barratry. Strike me, if I haven't thought of scuttling the dough-dish for her insoorance. There's regular trade, son, to be done in ships, and then there's pickin's an' pickin's an' pickin's. Lord, the ocean's rich with pickin's. Do you know there's millions made out of the day-bree and refuse of a big city? How about an ocean's day-bree, just chew on that notion a turn; an' as fur a lookout, lemmee tell you, son, cast your eye out yon," and he swept the sea with a forearm; "nothin', hey, so it looks, but lemmee tell you, son, there ain't no manner of place on the ball of dirt where you're likely to run up afoul of so many things—unexpected things—as at sea. When you're clear o' land lay to this here pree-cep', 'A million to one on the unexpected.'"

The next day fell almost dead calm. The hale, lusty-lunged nor'wester that had snorted them forth from the Golden Gate had lapsed to a zephyr, the schooner rolled lazily southward with the leisurely nonchalance of a grazing ox. At noon, just after dinner, a few cat's-paws curdled the milky-blue whiteness of the glassy surface, and the water once more began to talk beneath the bow-sprit. It was very hot. The sun spun silently like a spinning brass discus over the mainmast. On the fo'c'sle head the Chinamen were asleep or smoking opium. It was Charlie's watch. Kitchell dozed in his hammock in the shadow of the mainsheet. Wilbur was below tinkering with his paint-pot about the cabin. The stillness was profound. It was the stillness of the summer sea at high noon.

The lookout in the crow's nest broke the quiet.

"Hy-yah, hy-yah!" he cried, leaning from the barrel and calling through an arched palm. "Hy-yah, one two, plenty, many tortle, topside, wattah; hy-yah, all-same tortle."

"Hello, hello!" cried the Captain, rolling from his hammock. "Turtle? Where-away?"

"I tink-um 'bout quallah mile, mebbee, four-piecee tortle all-same weatha bow."

"Turtle, hey? Down y'r wheel, Jim, haul y'r jib to win'ward," he commanded the man at the wheel; then to the men forward: "Get the dory overboard. Son, Charlie, and you, Wing, tumble in. Wake up now and see you stay so."

The dory was swung over the side, and the men dropped into her and took their places at the oars. "Give way," cried the Captain, settling himself in the bow with the gaff in his hand. "Hey, Jim!"

he shouted to the lookout far above, "hey, lay our course for us." The lookout nodded, the oars fell, and the dory shot forward in the direction indicated by the lookout.

"Kin you row, son? asked Kitchell, with sudden suspicion. Wilbur smiled.

"You ask Charlie and Wing to ship their oars and give me a pair." The Captain complied, hesitating.

"Now, what," he said grimly, "now, what do you think you're going to do, sonny?"

"I'm going to show you the Bob Cook stroke we used in our boat in '95, when we beat Harvard," answered Wilbur.

Kitchell gazed doubtfully at the first few strokes, then with growing interest watched the tremendous reach, the powerful knee-drive, the swing, the easy catch, and the perfect recover. The dory was cutting the water like a gasoline launch, and between strokes there was the least possible diminishing of the speed.

"I'm a bit out of form just now," remarked Wilbur, "and I'm used to the sliding seat; but I guess it'll do." Kitchell glanced at the human machine that once was No. 5 in the Yale boat and then at the water hissing from the dory's bows. "My Gawd!" he said, under his breath. He spat over the bows and sucked the nicotine from his mustache, thoughtfully.

"I ree-marked," he observed, "as how you had brains, my son."

A few minutes later the Captain, who was standing in the dory's bow and alternately conning the ocean's surface and looking back to the Chinaman standing on the schooner's masthead, uttered an exclamation:

"Steady, ship your oars, quiet now, quiet, you damn fools! We're right on 'em—four, by Gawd, an' big as dinin' tables!"

The oars were shipped. The dory's speed dwindled. "Out your paddles, sit on the gun'l, and paddle ee-asy." The hands obeyed. The Captain's voice dropped to a whisper. His back was toward them and he gestured with one free hand. Looking out over the water from his seat on the gun'l, Wilbur could make out a round, greenish mass like a patch of floating seaweed, just under the surface, some sixty yards ahead.

"Easy sta'board," whispered the Captain under his elbow. "Go ahead, port; e-e-easy all, steady, steady."

The affair began to assume the intensity of a little drama—a little drama of midocean. In spite of himself, Wilbur was excited. He even found occasion to observe that the life was not so bad,

after all. This was as good fun as stalking deer. The dory moved forward by inches. Kitchell's whisper was as faint as a dying infant's: "Steady all, s-stead-ee, sh-stead—"

He lunged forward sharply with the gaff, and shouted aloud: "I got him—grab holt his tail flippers, you fool swabs; grab holt quick—don't you leggo—got him there, Charlie? If he gets away, you swine, I'll rip y' open with the gaff—heave now—heave—there—there—soh, stand clear his nippers. Strike me! he's a whacker. I thought he was going to get away. Saw me just as I swung the gaff, an' ducked his nut."

Over the side, bundled without ceremony into the boat, clawing, thrashing, clattering, and blowing like the exhaust of a donkey-engine, tumbled the great green turtle, his wet, green shield of shell three feet from edge to edge, the gaff firmly transfixed in his body, just under the fore-flipper. From under his shell protruded his snake-like head and neck, withered like that of an old man. He was waving his head from side to side, the jaws snapping like a snapped silk handkerchief. Kitchell thrust him away with a paddle. The turtle craned his neck, and catching the bit of wood in his jaw, bit it in two in a single grip.

"I tol' you so, I tol' you to stand clear his snapper. If that had been your shin now, eh? Hello, what's that?"

Faintly across the water came a prolonged hallooing from the schooner. Kitchell stood up in the dory, shading his eyes with his hat.

"What's biting 'em now?" he muttered, with the uneasiness of a captain away from his ship. "Oughta left Charlie on board—or you, son. Who's doin' that yellin', I can't make out."

"Up in the crow's nest," exclaimed Wilbur. "It's Jim, see, he's waving his arms."

"Well, whaduz he wave his dam' fool arms for?" growled Kitchell, angry because something was going forward he did not understand.

"There, he's shouting again. Listen—I can't make out what he's yelling."

"He'll yell to a different pipe when I get my grip of him. I'll twist the head of that swab till he'll have to walk back'ard to see where he's goin'. Whaduz he wave his arms for—whaduz he yell like a dam' philly-loo bird for? What's him say, Charlie?"

"Jim heap sing, no can tell. Mebbee—tinkum sing, come back chop-chop."

"We'll see. Oars out, men, give way. Now, son, put a little o' that Yale stingo in the stroke."

In the crow's nest Jim still yelled and waved like one distraught, while the dory returned at a smart clip toward the schooner. Kitchell lathered with fury.

"Oh-h," he murmured softly through his gritted teeth. "Jess lemmee lay mee two hands afoul of you wunst, you gibbering, yellow philly-loo bird, believe me, you'll dance. Shut up!" he roared; "shut up, you crazy do-do, ain't we coming fast as we can?"

The dory bumped alongside, and the Captain was over the rail like quicksilver. The hands were all in the bow, looking and pointing to the west. Jim slid down the ratlines, bubbling over with suppressed news. Before his feet had touched the deck Kitchell had kicked him into the stays again, fulminating blasphemies.

"Sing!" he shouted, as the Chinaman clambered away like a bewildered ape; "sing a little more. I would if I were you. Why don't you sing and wave, you dam' fool philly-loo bird?"

"Yas, sah," answered the coolie.

"What you yell for? Charlie, ask him whaffo him sing."

"I tink-um ship," answered Charlie calmly, looking out over the starboard quarter.

"Ship!"

"Him velly sick," hazarded the Chinaman from the ratlines, adding a sentence in Chinese to Charlie.

"He says he tink-um ship sick, all same; ask um something—ship velly sick."

By this time the Captain, Wilbur, and all on board could plainly make out a sail some eight miles off the starboard bow. Even at that distance, and to eyes so inexperienced as those of Wilbur, it needed but a glance to know that something was wrong with her. It was not that she failed to ride the waves with even keel, it was not that her rigging was in disarray, nor that her sails were disordered. Her distance was too great to make out such details. But in precisely the same manner as a trained physician glances at a doomed patient, and from that indefinable look in the face of him and the eyes of him pronounces the verdict "death," so Kitchell took in the stranger with a single comprehensive glance, and exclaimed:

"Wreck!"

"Yas, sah. I tink-um velly sick."

"Oh, go to 'll, or go below and fetch up my glass—hustle!"

The glass was brought. "Son," exclaimed Kitchell—"where is that man with the brains? Son, come aloft here with me." The two clambered up the ratlines to the crow's nest. Kitchell adjusted the glass.

"She's a bark," he muttered, "iron built—about seven hundred tons, I guess—in distress. There's her ensign upside down at the mizz'nhead—looks like Norway—an' her distress signals on the spanker gaff. Take a blink at her, son—what do you make her out? Lord, she's ridin' high."

Wilbur took the glass, catching the stranger after several clumsy attempts. She was, as Captain Kitchell had announced, a bark, and, to judge by her flag, evidently Norwegian.

"How she rolls!" muttered Wilbur.

"That's what I can't make out," answered Kitchell. "A bark such as she ain't ought to roll thata way; her ballast'd steady her."

"What's the flags on that boom aft—one's red and white and square-shaped, and the other's the same color, only swallow-tail in shape?"

"That's H. B., meanin': 'I am in need of assistance.'"

"Well, where's the crew? I don't see anybody on board."

"Oh, they're there right enough."

"Then they're pretty well concealed about the premises," returned Wilbur, as he passed the glass to the Captain.

"She does seem kinda empty," said the Captain in a moment, with a sudden show of interest that Wilbur failed to understand.

"An' where's her boats?" continued Kitchell. "I don't just quite make out any boats at all." There was a long silence.

"Seems to be a sort of haze over her," observed Wilbur.

"I noticed that, air kinda quivers oily-like. No boats, no boats—an' I can't see anybody aboard." Suddenly Kitchell lowered the glass and turned to Wilbur. He was a different man. There was a new shine in his eyes, a wicked line appeared over the nose, the jaw grew salient, prognathous.

"Son," he exclaimed, gimleting Wilbur with his contracted eyes; "I have reemarked as how you had brains. I kin fool the coolies, but I can't fool you. It looks to me as if that bark yonder was a derelict; an' do you know what that means to us? Chaw on it a turn."

"A derelict?"

"If there's a crew on board they're concealed from the public gaze—an' where are the boats then? I figger she's an abandoned

derelict. Do you know what that means for us—for you and I? It means," and gripping Wilbur by the shoulders, he spoke the word into his face with a savage intensity. "It means salvage, do you savvy?—salvage, salvage. Do you figger what salvage on a seven-hundred-tonner would come to? Well, just lemmee drop it into your think tank, an' lay to what I say. It's all the ways from fifty to seventy thousand dollars, whatever her cargo is; call it sixty thousand—thirty thou' apiece. Oh, I don't know!" he exclaimed, lapsing to landman's slang. "Wha'd I say about a million to one on the unexpected at sea?'

"Thirty thousand!" exclaimed Wilbur, without thought as yet.

"Now y'r singin' songs," cried the Captain. "Listen to me, son," he went on, rapidly shutting up the glass and thrusting it back in the case; "my name's Kitchell, and I'm hog right through." He emphasized the words with a leveled forefinger, his eyes flashing. H—O—G spells very truly yours, Alvinza Kitchell—ninety-nine swine an' me make a hundred swine. I'm a shoat with both feet in the trough, first, last, an' always. If that bark's abandoned, an' I says she is, she's ours. I'm out for anything that there's stuff in. I guess I'm more of a beach-comber by nature than anything else. If she's abandoned she belongs to us. To 'll with this coolie game. We'll go beach-combin', you and I. We'll board that bark and work her into the nearest port—San Diego, I guess—and get the salvage on her if we have to swim in her. Are you with me?" he held out his hand. The man was positively trembling from head to heel. It was impossible to resist the excitement of the situation, its novelty—the high crow's nest of the schooner, the keen salt air, the Chinamen grouped far below, the indigo of the warm ocean, and out yonder the forsaken derelict, rolling her light hull till the garboard streak flashed in the sun.

"Well, of course, I'm with you, Cap," exclaimed Wilbur, gripping Kitchell's hand. "When there's thirty thousand to be had for the asking I guess I'm a 'na'chel bawn' beach-comber myself."

"Now, nothing about this to the coolies."

"But how will you make out with your owners, the Six Companies? Aren't you bound to bring the 'Bertha' in?"

"Rot my owners!" exclaimed Kitchell. "I ain't a skipper of no oil-boat any longer. I'm a beach-comber." He fixed the wallowing bark with glistening eyes. "Gawd strike me," he murmured, "ain't she a daisy? It's a little Klondike. Come on, son."

The two went down the ratlines, and Kitchell ordered a couple

of the hands into the dory that had been rowing astern. He and Wilbur followed. Charlie was left on board, with directions to lay the schooner to. The dory flew over the water, Wilbur setting the stroke. In a few moments she was well up with the bark. Though a larger boat than the "Bertha Millner," she was rolling in lamentable fashion, and every laboring heave showed her bottom incrusted with barnacles and seaweed.

Her fore and main tops'ls and to'gallants'ls were set, as also were her lower stays'ls and royals. But the braces seemed to have parted, and the yards were swinging back and forth in their ties. The spanker was brailed up, and the spanker boom thrashed idly over the poop as the bark rolled and rolled and rolled. The mainmast was working in its shoe, the rigging and backstays sagged. An air of abandonment, of unspeakable loneliness, of abomination hung about her. Never had Wilbur seen anything more utterly alone. Within three lengths the Captain rose in his place and shouted:

"Bark ahoy!" There was no answer. Thrice he repeated the call, and thrice the dismal thrashing of the spanker boom and the flapping of the sails was the only answer. Kitchell turned to Wilbur in triumph. "I guess she's ours," he whispered. They were now close enough to make out the bark's name upon her counter, "Lady Letty," and Wilbur was in the act of reading it aloud, when a huge brown dorsal fin, like the triangular sail of a lugger, cut the water between the dory and the bark.

"Shark!" said Kitchell; "and there's another!" he exclaimed in the next instant, "and another! Strike me, the water's alive with 'em'! There's a stiff on the bark, you can lay to that"; and at that, acting on some strange impulse, he called again, "Bark ahoy!" There was no response.

The dory was now well up to the derelict, and pretty soon a prolonged and vibratory hissing noise, strident, insistent, smote upon their ears.

"What's that?" exclaimed Wilbur, perplexed. The Captain shook his head, and just then, as the bark rolled almost to her scuppers in their direction, a glimpse of the deck was presented to their view. It was only a glimpse, gone on the instant, as the bark rolled back to port, but it was time enough for Wilbur and the Captain to note the parted and open seams and the deck bulging, and in one corner blown up and splintered.

The captain smote a thigh.

"Coal!" he cried. "Anthracite coal. The coal he't up and generated gas, of course—no fire, y'understand, just gas—gas blew up the deck—no way of stopping combustion. Naturally they had to cut for it. Smell the gas, can't you? No wonder she's hissing—no wonder she rolled—cargo goes off in gas—and what's to weigh her down? I was wondering what could 'a' wrecked her in this weather. Lord, it's as plain as Billy-b'damn."

The dory was alongside. Kitchell watched his chance, and as the bark rolled down caught the mainyard-brace hanging in a bight over the rail and swung himself to the deck. "Look sharp!" he called, as Wilbur followed. "It won't do for you to fall among them shark, son. Just look at the hundreds of 'em. There's a stiff on board, sure."

Wilbur steadied himself on the swaying broken deck, choking against the reek of coal-gas that hissed upward on every hand. The heat was almost like a furnace. Everything metal was intolerable to the touch.

"She's abandoned, sure," muttered the Captain. "Look," and he pointed to the empty chocks on the house and the severed lashings. "Oh, it's a haul, son; it's a haul, an' you can lay to that. Now, then, cabin first," and he started aft.

But it was impossible to go into the cabin. The moment the door was opened suffocating billows of gas rushed out and beat them back. On the third trial the Captain staggered out, almost overcome with its volume.

"Can't get in there for a while yet," he gasped, "but I saw the stiff on the floor by the table; looks like the old man. He's spit his false teeth out. I knew there was a stiff aboard."

"Then there's more than one," said Wilbur. "See there!" From behind the wheel-box in the stern protruded a hand and forearm in an oilskin sleeve.

Wilbur ran up, peered over the little space between the wheel and the wheel-box, and looked straight into a pair of eyes—eyes that were alive. Kitchell came up.

"One left, anyhow," he muttered, looking over Wilbur's shoulder; "sailor man, though; can't interfere with our salvage. The bark's derelict, right enough. Shake him out of there, son; can't you see the lad's dotty with the gas?"

Cramped into the narrow space of the wheel-box like a terrified hare in a blind burrow was the figure of a young boy. So firmly was he wedged into the corner that Kitchell had to kick down the

box before he could be reached. The boy spoke no word. Stupefied with the gas, he watched them with vacant eyes.

Wilbur put a hand under the lad's arm and got him to his feet. He was a tall, well-made fellow, with ruddy complexion and milk-blue eyes, and was dressed, as if for heavy weather, in oilskins.

"Well, sonny, you've had a fine mess aboard here," said Kitchell. The boy—he might have been two and twenty—stared and frowned.

"Clean loco from the gas. Get him into the dory, son. I'll try this bloody cabin again."

Kitchell turned back and descended from the poop, and Wilbur, his arm around the boy, followed. Kitchell was already out of hearing, and Wilbur was bracing himself upon the rolling deck, steadying the young fellow at his side, when the latter heaved a deep breath. His throat and breast swelled. Wilbur stared sharply, with a muttered exclamation:

"My God, it's a girl!" he said.

IV

MORAN

MEANWHILE Charlie had brought the "Bertha Millner" up to within hailing distance of the bark, and had hove her to. Kitchell ordered Wilbur to return to the schooner and bring over a couple of axes.

"We'll have to knock holes all through the house, and break in the skylights and let the gas escape before we can do anything. Take the kid over and give him whiskey; then come along back and bear a hand."

Wilbur had considerable difficulty in getting into the dory from the deck of the plunging derelict with his dazed and almost helpless charge. Even as he slid down the rope into the little boat and helped the girl to follow, he was aware of two dull, brownish-green shadows moving just beneath the water's surface not ten feet away, and he knew that he was being stealthily watched. The Chinamen at the oars of the dory, with that extraordinary absence of curiosity which is the mark of the race, did not glance a second time at the survivor of the "Lady Letty's" misadventure. To them it was evident she was but a for'mast hand. However, Wilbur examined her with extraordinary interest as she sat in the sternsheets, sullen, half-defiant, half-bewildered, and bereft of speech.

She was not pretty—she was too tall for that—quite as tall as Wilbur himself, and her skeleton was too massive. Her face was red, and the glint of blue ice was in her eyes. Her eyelashes and eyebrows, as well as the almost imperceptible down that edged her cheek when she turned against the light, were blond almost to whiteness. What beauty she had was of the fine, hardy Norse type. Her hands were red and hard, and even beneath the coarse sleeve of the oilskin coat one could infer that the biceps and deltoids were large and powerful. She was coarse-fibred, no doubt, mentally as well as physically, but her coarseness, so Wilbur guessed, would prove to be the coarseness of a primitive rather than of a degenerate character.

One thing he saw clearly during the few moments of the dory's

trip between bark and schooner—the fact that his charge was a woman must be kept from Captain Kitchell. Wilbur knew his man by now. It could be done. Kitchell and he would take the "Lady Letty" into the nearest port as soon as possible. The deception would have to be maintained only for a day or two.

He left the girl on board the schooner and returned to the derelict with the axes. He found Kitchell on the house, just returned from a hasty survey of the prize.

"She's a daisy," vociferated the Captain, as Wilbur came aboard. "I've been havin' a look 'round. She's brand-new. See the date on the capst'n-head? Christiania is her hailin' port—built there; but it's her papers I'm after. Then we'll know where we're at. How's the kid?"

"She's all right," answered Wilbur, before he could collect his thoughts. But the Captain thought he had reference to the "Bertha."

"I mean the kid we found in the wheel-box. He doesn't count in our salvage. The bark's been abandoned as plain as paint. If I thought he stood in our way," and Kitchell's jaw grew salient, "I'd shut him in the cabin with the old man a spell, till he'd copped off. Now then, son, first thing to do is to chop vents in this yere house."

"Hold up—we can do better than that," said Wilbur, restraining Kitchell's fury of impatience. "Slide the big skylight off—it's loose already."

A couple of the schooner's hands were ordered aboard the "Lady Letty," and the skylight removed. At first the pour of gas was terrific, but by degrees it abated, and at the end of half an hour Kitchell could keep back no longer.

"Come on!" he cried, catching up an axe; "rot the difference." All the plundering instincts of the man were aroused and clamoring. He had become a very wolf within scent of its prey—a veritable hyena nuzzling about its carrion.

"Lord!" he gasped, "t' think that everything we see, everything we find, is ours!"

Wilbur himself was not far behind him in eagerness. Somewhere deep down in the heart of every Anglo-Saxon lies the predatory instinct of his Viking ancestors—an instinct that a thousand years of respectability and taxpaying have not quite succeeded in eliminating.

A flight of six steps, brass-bound and bearing the double L of

the bark's monogram, led them down into a sort of vestibule. From the vestibule a door opened directly into the main cabin. They entered.

The cabin was some twenty feet long and unusually spacious. Fresh from his recollection of the grime and reek of the schooner, it struck Wilbur as particularly dainty. It was painted white with stripes of blue, gold and pea-green. On either side three doors opened off into staterooms and private cabins, and with each roll of the derelict these doors banged like an irregular discharge of revolvers. In the centre was the dining-table, covered with a red cloth, very much awry. On each side of the table were four arm-chairs, screwed to the deck, one somewhat larger at the head. Overhead, in swinging racks, were glasses and decanters of whiskey and some kind of white wine. But for one feature the sight of the "Letty's" cabin was charming. However, on the floor by the sliding door in the forward bulkhead lay a body, face upward.

The body was that of a middle-aged, fine-looking man, his head covered with the fur, ear-lapped cap that Norwegians affect, even in the tropics. The eyes were wide open, the face discolored. In the last gasp of suffocation the set of false teeth had been forced half-way out of his mouth, distorting the countenance with a hideous simian grin. Instantly Kitchell's eye was caught by the glint of the gold in which these teeth were set.

"Here's about $100 to begin with," he exclaimed, and picking up the teeth, dropped them into his pocket with a wink at Wilbur. The body of the dead Captain was passed up through the skylight and slid out on the deck, and Wilbur and Kitchell turned their attention to what had been his stateroom.

The Captain's room was the largest one of the six staterooms opening from the main cabin.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Kitchell as he and Wilbur entered. "The old man's room, and no mistake."

Besides the bunk, the stateroom was fitted up with a lounge of red plush screwed to the bulkhead. A roll of charts leaned in one corner, an alarm clock, stopped at 1:15, stood on a shelf in the company of some dozen paper-covered novels and a drinking-glass full of cigars. Over the lounge, however, was the rack of instruments, sextant, barometer, chronometer, glass, and the like, securely screwed down, while against the wall, in front of a swivel leather chair that was ironed to the deck, was the locked secretary.

"Look at 'em, just look at 'em, will you!" said Kitchell, run-

ning his fingers lovingly over the polished brass of the instruments. "There's a thousand dollars of stuff right here. The chronometer's worth five hundred alone, Bennett & Sons' own make." He turned to the secretary.

"Now!" he exclaimed with a long breath.

What followed thrilled Wilbur with alternate excitement, curiosity, and a vivid sense of desecration and sacrilege. For the life of him he could not make the thing seem right or legal in his eyes, and yet he had neither the wish nor the power to stay his hand or interfere with what Kitchell was doing.

The Captain put the blade of the axe in the chink of the secretary's door and wrenched it free. It opened down to form a sort of desk, and disclosed an array of cubby-holes and two small doors, both locked. These latter Kitchell smashed in with the axe-head. Then he seated himself in the swivel chair and began to rifle their contents systematically, Wilbur leaning over his shoulder.

The heat from the coal below them was almost unbearable. In the cabin the six doors kept up a continuous ear-shocking fusillade, as though half a dozen men were fighting with revolvers; from without, down the open skylight, came the sing-song talk of the Chinamen and the wash and ripple of the two vessels, now side by side. The air, foul beyond expression, tasted of brass, their heads swam and ached to bursting, but absorbed in their work they had no thought of the lapse of time nor the discomfort of their surroundings. Twice during the examination of the bark's papers, Kitchell sent Wilbur out into the cabin for the whiskey decanter in the swinging racks.

"Here's the charter papers," said Kitchell, unfolding and spreading them out one by one; "and here's the clearing papers from Blyth in England. This yere's the insoorance, and here, this is—rot that, nothin' but the articles for the crew—no use to us."

In a separate envelope, carefully sealed and bound, they came upon the Captain's private papers. A marriage certificate setting forth the union between Eilert Sternersen, of Fruholmen, Norway, and Sarah Moran, of some seaport town (the name was undecipherabe) of the North of England. Next came a birth certificate of a daughter named Moran, dated twenty-two years back, and a bill of sale of the bark "Lady Letty," whereby a two-thirds interest was conveyed from the previous owners (a shipbuilding firm of Christiania) to Capt. Eilert Sternersen.

"The old man was his own boss," commented Kitchell. "Hello!"

he remarked, "look here"; a yellowed photograph was in his hand, the picture of a stout, fair-haired woman of about forty, wearing enormous pendant earrings in the style of the early sixties. Below was written: "S. Moran Sternersen, ob. 1867."

"Old woman copped off," said Kitchell, "so much the better for us; no heirs to put in their gab; an'—hold hard—steady all—here's the will, s'help me."

The only items of importance in the will were the confirmation of the wife's death and the expressly stated bequest of "the bark known as and sailing under the name of the 'Lady Letty' to my only and beloved daughter, Moran."

"Well," said Wilbur.

The Captain sucked his mustache, then furiously, striking the desk with his fist:

"The bark's ours!" there was a certain ring of defiance in his voice. "Damn the will! I ain't so cock-sure about the law, but I'll make sure."

"As how?" said Wilbur.

Kitchell slung the will out of the open port into the sea.

"That's how," he remarked. "I'm the heir. I found the bark; mine she is, an' mine she stays—yours an' mine, that is."

But Wilbur had not even time to thoroughly enjoy the satisfaction that the Captain's words conveyed, before an idea suddenly presented itself to him. The girl he had found on board of the bark, the ruddy, fair-hiared girl of the fine and hardy Norse type—that was the daughter, of course; that was "Moran." Instantly the situation adjusted itself in his imagination. The two inseparables, father and daughter, sailors both, their lives passed together on shipboard, and the "Lady Letty" their dream, their ambition, a vessel that at last they could call their own.

Then this disastrous voyage—perhaps the first in their new craft—the combustion in the coal—the panic terror of the crew and their desertion of the bark, and the sturdy resolution of the father and daughter to bring the "Letty" in—to work her into port alone. They had failed; the father had died from gas; the girl, at least for the moment, was crazed from its effects. But the bark had not been abandoned. The owner was on board. Kitchell was wrong; she was no derelict; not one penny could they gain by her salvage.

For an instant a wave of bitterest disappointment passed over Wilbur as he saw his $30,000 dwindling to nothing. Then the in-

stincts of habit reasserted themselves. The taxpayer in him was stronger than the freebooter, after all. He felt that it was his duty to see to it that the girl had her rights. Kitchell must be made aware of the situation—must be told that Moran, the daughter, the Captain's heir, was on board the schooner; that the "kid" found in the wheel-box was a girl. But on second thought that would never do. Above all things, the brute Kitchell must not be shown that a girl was aboard the schooner on which he had absolute command, nor, setting the question of Moran's sex aside, must Kitchell know her even as the dead Captain's heir. There was a difference in the men here, and Wilbur appreciated it. Kitchell, the law-abiding taxpayer, was a weakling in comparison with Kitchell, the freebooter and beach-comber in sight of his prize.

"Son," said the Captain, making a bundle of all the papers, "take these over to my bunk and hide 'em under the donkey's breakfast. Stop a bit," he added, as Wilbur started away. "I'll go with you. We'll have to bury the old man."

Throughout all the afternoon the Captain had been drinking the whiskey from the decanter found in the cabin; now he stood up unsteadily, and, raising his glass, exclaimed:

"Sonny, here's to Kitchell, Wilbur & Co., beach-combers, unlimited. What do you say, hey?"

"I only want to be sure that we've a right to the bark," answered Wilbur.

"Right to her—ri-hight to 'er," hiccoughed the Captain. "Strike me blind, I'd like to see any one try'n take her away from Alvinza Kitchell now," and he thrust out his chin at Wilbur.

"Well, so much the better, then," said Wilbur, pocketing the papers. The pair ascended to the deck.

The burial of Captain Sternersen was a dreadful business. Kitchell, far gone in whiskey, stood on the house issuing his orders, drinking from one of the decanters he had brought up with him. He had already rifled the dead man's pockets, and had even taken away the boots and fur-lined cap. Cloths were cut from the spanker and rolled around the body. Then Kitchell ordered the peak halyards unrove and used as lashings to tie the canvas around the corpse. The red and white flags (the distress signals) were still bound on the halyards.

"Leave 'em on. Leave 'em on," commanded Kitchell. "Use 'm as a shrou'. All ready now, stan' by to let her go."

Wilbur looked over at the schooner and noted with immense

relief that Moran was not in sight. Suddenly an abrupt reaction took place in the Captain's addled brain.

"Can't bury 'um 'ithout 'is teeth," he gabbled solemnly. He laid back the canvas and replaced the set. "Ole man'd ha'nt me 'f I kep' 's teeth. Strike! look a' that, I put 'em in upside down. Nev' min'. upsi' down, downsi' up, whaz odds, all same with ole Bill, hey, ole Bill, all same with you, hey?" Suddenly he began to howl with laughter. "T' think a bein' buried with y'r teeth upsi' down. Oh, mee, but that's a good grind. Stan' by to heave ole Uncle Bill over —ready, heave, an' away she goes." He ran to the side, waving his hat and looking over. "Goo'-by, ole Bill, by-by. There you go, an' the signal o' distress roun' you, H. B. 'I'm in need of assistance.' Lord, here comes the sharks—look! look! look at um fight! look at um takin' ole Bill! I'm in need of assistance. I sh'd say you were, ole Bill."

Wilbur looked once over the side in the churning, lashing water, then drew back, sick to vomiting. But in less than thirty seconds the water was quiet. Not a shark was in sight.

"Get over t' the 'Bertha' with those papers, son," ordered Kitchell; "I'll bide here and dig up sh' mor' loot. I'll gut this ole pill-box from stern to stem-post 'fore I'll leave. I won't leave a copper rivet in 'er, notta co'er rivet, dyhear?" he shouted, his face purple with unnecessary rage.

Wilbur returned to the schooner with the two Chinamen, leaving Kitchell alone on the bark. He found the girl sitting by the rudderhead almost as he had left her, looking about her with vague, unseeing eyes.

"You name is Moran, isn't it?" he asked. "Moran Sternersen."

"Yes," she said, after a pause, then looked curiously at a bit of tarred rope on the deck. Nothing more could be got out of her. Wilbur talked to her at length, and tried to make her understand the situation, but it was evident she did not follow. However, at each mention of her name she would answer:

"Yes, yes, I'm Moran."

Wilbur turned away from her, biting his nether lip in perplexity.

"Now, what am I going to do?" he muttered. "What a situation! If I tell the Captain, it's all up with the girl. If he didn't kill her, he'd do worse—might do both. If I don't tell him, there goes her birthright, $60,000, and she alone in the world. It's begun to go already," he added, listening to the sounds that came from the

bark. Kitchell was raging to and fro in the cabin in a frenzy of drink, axe in hand, smashing glassware, hacking into the woodwork, singing the while at the top of his voice:

"As through the drop I go, drop I go,
As through the drop I go, drop I go,
As through the drop I go,
Down to hell that yawns below,
Twenty stiffs all in a row
Damn your eyes."

"That's the kind of man I have to deal with," muttered Wilbur. "It's encouraging, and there's no one to talk to. Not much help in a Chinaman and a crazy girl in a man's oilskins. It's about the biggest situation you ever faced, Ross Wilbur, and you're all alone. What the devil are you going to do?"

He acknowledged with considerable humiliation that he could not get the better of Kitchell, either physically or mentally. Kitchell was a more powerful man than he, and cleverer. The Captain was in his element now, and he was the commander. On shore it would have been vastly different. The city-bred fellow, with a policeman always in call, would have known how to act.

"I simply can't stand by and see that hog plundering everything she's got. What's to be done?"

And suddenly, while the words were yet in his mouth, the sun was wiped from the sky like writing from a slate, the horizon blackened, vanished, a long white line of froth whipped across the sea and came on hissing. A hollow note boomed out, boomed, swelled, and grew rapidly to a roar.

An icy chill stabbed the air. Then the squall swooped and struck, and the sky shut down over the troubled ocean like a pot-lid over a boiling pot. The schooner's fore and main sheets, that had not been made fast, unrove at the first gust and began to slat wildly in the wind. The Chinamen cowered to the decks, grasping at cleats, stays, and masts. They were helpless—paralyzed with fear. Charlie clung to a stay, one arm over his head, as though dodging a blow. Wilbur gripped the rail with his hands where he stood, his teeth set, his eyes wide, waiting for the foundering of the schooner, his only thought being that the end could not be far. He had heard of the suddenness of tropical squalls, but this had come with the abruptness of a scene-shift at a play. The schooner

veered broad-on to the waves. It was the beginning of the end—another roll to the leeward like the last and the Pacific would come aboard.

"And you call yourselves sailor men! Are you going to drown like rats on a plank?" A voice that Wilbur did not know went ringing through that horrid shouting of wind and sea like the call of a bugle. He turned to see Moran, the girl of the "Lady Letty," standing erect upon the quarterdeck, holding down the schooner's wheel. The confusion of that dreadful moment, that had paralyzed the crew's senses, had brought back hers. She was herself again, savage, splendid, dominant, superb, in her wrath at their weakness, their cowardice.

Her heavy brows were knotted over her flaming eyes, her hat was gone, and her thick bands of yellow hair whipped across her face and streamed out in the wind like streamers of the northern lights. As she shouted, gesturing furiously to the men, the loose sleeve of the oilskin coat fell back, and showed her forearm, strong, round, and white as scud, the hand and wrist so tanned as to look almost like a glove. And all the while she shouted aloud, furious with indignation, raging against the supineness of the "Bertha's" crew.

"Stand by, men! stand by! Look alive, now! Make fast the stays'l halyards to the dory's warp! Now, then, unreeve y'r halyards! all clear there! pass the end for'd outside the rigging! outside! you fools! Make fast to the bits for'ard—let go y'r line—that'll do. Soh—soh. There, she's coming up."

The dory had been towing astern, and the seas combing over her had swamped her. Moran had been inspired to use the swamped boat as a sea-anchor, fastening her to the schooner's bow instead of to the stern. The "Bertha's" bow, answering to the drag, veered around. The "Bertha" stood head to the seas, riding out the squall. It was a masterpiece of seamanship, conceived and executed in the very thick of peril, and it saved the schooner.

But there was little time to think of themselves. On board the bark the sails were still set. The squall struck the "Lady Letty" squarely aback. She heeled over upon the instant; then as the top hamper carried away with a crash, eased back a moment upon an even keel. But her cargo had shifted. The bark was doomed. Through the flying spray and scud and rain Wilbur had a momentary glimpse of Kitchell, hacking at the lanyards with his axe. Then the "Lady Letty" capsized, going over till her masts were

flat with the water, and in another second rolled bottom up. For a moment her keel and red iron bottom were visible through the mist of driving spoon-drift. Suddenly they sank from sight. She was gone.

And then, like the rolling up of a scroll, the squall passed, the sun returned, the sky burned back to blue, the ruggedness was smoothed from the ocean, and the warmth of the tropics closed around the "Bertha Millner," once more rolling easily on the swell of the ocean.

Of the "Lady Letty" and the drunken beach-combing Captain not a trace remained. Kitchell had gone down with his prize. The "Bertha Millner's" Chinese crew huddled forward, talking wildly, pointing and looking in a bewildered fashion over the sides.

Wilbur and Moran were left alone on the open Pacific.

V

A GIRL CAPTAIN

When Wilbur came on deck the morning after the sinking of the bark he was surprised to find the schooner under way again. Wilbur and Charlie had berthed forward during that night—Charlie with the hands, Wilbur in the Captain's hammock. The reason for this change of quarters had been found in a peremptory order from Moran during the dog-watch the preceding evening.

She had looked squarely at Wilbur from under her scowl, and had said briefly and in a fine contralto voice, that he had for the first time noted: "I berth aft, in the cabin; you and the Chinaman forward. Understand?"

Moran had only forestalled Wilbur's intention; while after her almost miraculous piece of seamanship in the rescue of the schooner, Charlie and the Chinese crew accorded her a respect that was almost superstitious.

Wilbur met her again at breakfast. She was still wearing men's clothing—part of Kitchell's outfit—and was booted to the knee; but now she wore no hat, and her enormous mane of rye-colored hair was braided into long strands near to the thickness of a man's arm. The redness of her face gave a startling effect to her pale blue eyes and sandy, heavy eyebrows, that easily lowered to a frown. She ate with her knife, and after pushing away her plate Wilbur observed that she drank half a tumbler of whiskey and water.

The conversation between the two was tame enough. There was no common ground upon which they could meet. To her father's death—no doubt an old matter even before her rescue—she made no allusion. Her attitude toward Wilbur was one of defiance and suspicion. Only once did she relax:

"How did you come to be aboard here with these rat-eaters—you're no sailor?" she said abruptly.

"Huh!" laughed Wilbur, mirthlessly; "huh! I was shanghaied."

Moran smote the table with a red fist, and shouted with sonorous, bell-toned laughter.

"Shanghaied?—you? Now, that is really good. And what are you going to do now?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Signal the first home-bound vessel and be taken into Frisco. I've my insurance to collect (Wilbur had given her the 'Letty's' papers) and the disaster to report."

"Well, I'm not keen on shark-hunting myself," said Wilbur. But Moran showed no interest in his plans.

However, they soon found that they were not to be permitted to signal. At noon the same day the schooner sighted a steamship's smoke on the horizon, and began to raise her rapidly. Moran immediately bound on the ensign, union down, and broke it out at the peak.

Charlie, who was at the wheel, spoke a sentence in Chinese, and one of the hands drew his knife across the halyards and brought the distress signal to the deck. Moran turned upon Charlie with an oath, her brows knitted.

"No! No!" sang Charlie, closing his eyes and wagging his head. "No! Too muchee los' time; no can stop. You come down-side cabin; you an' one-piece boss number two (this was Wilbur) have um chin-chin."

The odd conclave assembled about Kitchell's table—the clubman, the half-masculine girl in men's clothes, and the Chinaman. The conference was an angry one, Wilbur and Moran insisting that they be put aboard the steamship, Charlie refusing with calm obstinacy.

"I have um chin-chin with China boys las' nigh'. China boy heap flaid, no can stop um steamship. Heap flaid too much talkee-talkee. No stop; go fish now; go fish chop-chop. Los' heap time; go fish. I no savvy sail um boat, China boy no savvy sail um boat. I tink um you savvy (and he pointed to Moran). I tink um you savvy plenty heap much disa bay. Boss number two, him no savvy sail um boat, but him savvy plenty many all same."

"And we're to stop on board your dough-dish and navigate her for you?" shouted Moran, her face blazing.

Charlie nodded blandly: "I tink um yass."

"And when we get back to port," exclaimed Wilbur, "you think, perhaps I—we won't make it interesting for you?"

Charlie smiled.

"I tink um Six Company heap rich."

"Well, get along," ordered Moran, as though the schooner was her property, "and we'll talk it over."

"China boy like you heap pretty big," said Charlie to Moran, as he went out. "You savvy sail um boat all light; wanta you fo' captain. But," he added, suddenly dropping his bland passivity as though he wore a mask, and for an instant allowing the wicked malevolent Cantonese to come to the surface, "China boy no likee funnee business, savvy?" Then with a smile of a Talleyrand he disappeared.

Moran and Wilbur were helpless for the present. They were but two against seven Chinamen. They must stay on board, if the coolies wished it; and if they were to stay it was a matter of their own personal safety that the "Bertha Millner" should be properly navigated.

"I'll captain her," concluded Moran, sullenly, at the end of their talk. "You must act as mate, Mr. Wilbur. And don't get any mistaken idea into your head that, because I'm a young girl and alone, you are going to run things your way. I don't like funny business any better than Charlie."

"Look here," said Wilbur, complaining, "don't think I'm altogether a villain. I think you're a ripping fine girl. You're different from any kind of girl I ever met, of course, but you, by jingo, you're—you're splendid. There in the squall last evening, when you stood at the wheel, with your hair—"

"Oh, drop that!" said the girl, contemptuously, and went up on deck. Wilbur followed, scratching an ear.

Charlie was called aft and their decision announced. Moran would navigate the "Bertha Millner," Wilbur and she taking the watches. Charlie promised that he would answer for the obedience of the men.

Their first concern now was to shape their course for Magdalena Bay. Moran and Wilbur looked over Kitchell's charts and logbook, but the girl flung them aside disdainfully.

"He's been sailing by the dead reckoning, and his navigation is drivel. Why, a cabin-boy would know better; and, to end with, the chronometer is run down. I'll have to get Green'ich time by taking the altitude of a star to-night, and figure out our longitude. Did you bring off our sextant?"

Wilbur shook his head. "Only the papers," he said.

"There's only an old ebony quadrant here," said Moran, "but it will have to do."

That night, lying flat on her back on the deck with a quadrant to her eye, she "got a star and brought it down to the horizon," and sat up under the reeking lamp in the cabin nearly the whole night ciphering and ciphering till she had filled up the four sides of the log-slate with her calculations. However, by daylight she had obtained the correct Greenwich time and worked the schooner's longitude.

Two days passed, then a third. Moran set the schooner's course. She kept almost entirely to herself, and when not at the wheel or taking the sun or writing up the log, gloomed over the after-rail into the schooner's wake. Wilbur knew not what to think of her. Never in his life had he met with any girl like this. So accustomed had she been to the rough, give-and-take, direct associations of a seafaring life that she misinterpreted well-meant politeness—the only respect he knew how to pay her—to mean insidious advances. She was suspicious of him—distrusted him utterly, and openly ridiculed his abortive seamanship. Pretty she was not, but she soon began to have a certain amount of attraction for Wilbur. He liked her splendid ropes of hair, her heavy contralto voice, her fine animal strength of bone and muscle (admittedly greater than his own); he admired her indomitable courage and self-reliance, while her positive genius in the matters of seamanship and navigation filled him with speechless wonder. The girls he had been used to were clever only in their knowledge of the amenities of an afternoon call or the formalities of a paper german. A girl of two-and-twenty who could calculate longitude from the altitude of a star was outside his experience. The more he saw of her the more he knew himself to have been right in his first estimate. She drank whiskey after her meals, and when angry, which was often, swore like a buccaneer. As yet she was almost, as one might say, without sex—savage, unconquered, untamed, glorying in her own independence, her sullen isolation. Her neck was thick, strong, and very white, her hands roughened and calloused. In her men's clothes she looked tall, vigorous, and unrestrained, and on more than one occasion, as Wilbur passed close to her, he was made aware that her hair, her neck, her entire personality exhaled a fine, sweet, natural redolence that savored of the ocean and great winds.

One day, as he saw her handling a huge water-barrel by the chines only, with a strength he knew to be greater than his own, her brows contracted with the effort, her hair curling about her thick neck, her large, round arms bare to the elbow, a sudden thrill of

enthusiasm smote through him, and between his teeth he exclaimed to himself:

"By Jove, you're a woman!"

The "Bertha Millner" continued to the southward, gliding quietly over the oil-smoothness of the ocean under airs so light as hardly to ruffle the surface. Sometimes at high noon the shimmer of the ocean floor blended into the shimmer of the sky at the horizon, and then it was no longer water and blue heavens; the little craft seemed to be poised in a vast crystalline sphere, where there was neither height nor depth—poised motionless in warm, coruscating, opalescent space, alone with the sun.

At length one morning the schooner, which for the preceding twenty-four hours had been heading eastward, raised the land, and by the middle of the afternoon had come up to within a mile of a low, sandy shore, quivering with heat, and had tied up to the kelp in Magdalena Bay.

Charlie now took over entire charge of operations. For two days previous the Chinese hands had been getting out the deck-tubs, tackles, gaffs, spades, and the other shark-fishing gear that had been stowed forward. The sails were lowered and gasketed, the decks cleared of all impedimenta, hogsheads and huge vats stood ready in the waist, and the lazy indolence of the previous week was replaced by an extraordinary activity.

The day after their arrival in the bay was occupied by all hands in catching bait. This bait was a kind of rock-fish, of a beautiful red gold color, and about the size of an ordinary cod. They bit readily enough, but out of every ten hooked three were taken off the lines by the sharks before they could be brought aboard. Another difficulty lay in the fact that, either because of the excessive heat in the air or the percentage of alkali in the water, they spoiled almost immediately if left in the air.

Turtle were everywhere—floating gray-green disks just under the surface. Sea-birds in clouds clamored all day long about the shore and sand-pits. At long intervals flying-fish skittered over the water like skipping-stones. Shoals of porpoises came in from outside, leaping clumsily along the edges of the kelp. Bewildered land-birds perched on the schooner's rigging, and in the early morning the whistling of quail could be heard on shore near where a little fresh-water stream ran down to meet the ocean.

It was Wilbur who caught the first shark on the second morning of the "Bertha's" advent in Magdalena Bay. A store of bait

had been accumulated, split and halved into chunks for the shark-hooks, and Wilbur, baiting one of the huge lines that had been brought up on deck the evening before, flung it overboard, and watched the glimmer of the white fish-meat turning to a silvery green as it sank down among the kelp. Almost instantly a long moving shadow, just darker than the blue-green mass of the water, identified itself at a little distance.

Enormous flukes proceeded from either side, an erect dorsal fin, like an enormous cock's crest, rose from the back, while immediately over the head swam the two pilot-fish, following so closely the movement of the shark as to give the impression of actually adhering to his body. Twice and three times the great man-eater twelve feet from snout to tail-tip, circled slowly about the bait, the flukes moving fan-like through the water. Once he came up, touched the bait with his nose, and backed easily away. He disappeared, returned, and poised himself motionless in the schooner's shadow, feeling the water with his flukes.

Moran was looking over Wilbur's shoulder. "He's as good as caught," she muttered; "once let them get sight of meat, and—Steady now!" The shark moved forward. Suddenly, with a long, easy roll, he turned completely upon his back. His white belly flashed like silver in the water—the bait disappeared.

"You've got him!" shouted Moran.

The rope slid through Wilbur's palms, burning the skin as the huge sea-wolf sounded. Moran laid hold. The heavy, sullen wrenching from below twitched and swayed their bodies and threw them against each other. Her bare, cool arm was pressed close over his knuckles.

"Heave!" she cried, laughing with the excitement of the moment. "Heave all!"—she began the chant of sailors hauling at the ropes. Together, and bracing their feet against the schooner's rail, they fought out the fight with the great fish. In a swirl of lather the head and shoulders came above the surface, the flukes churning the water till it boiled like the wake of a screw steamship. But as soon as these great fins were clear of the surface the shark fell quiet and helpless.

Charlie came up with the cutting-in spade, and as the fish hung still over the side, cut him open from neck to belly with a single movement. Another Chinaman stood by with a long-handled gaff, hooked out the purple-black liver, brought it over the side, and dropped it into one of the deck-tubs. The shark thrashed and

writhed, his flukes quivering and his gills distended. Wilbur could not restrain an exclamation.

"Brutal business!" he muttered.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Moran, scornfully, "cutting-in is too good for him. Sailor-folk are no friends of such carrion as that."

Other lines were baited and dropped overboard, and the hands settled themselves to the real business of the expedition. There was no skill in the matter. The sharks bit ravenously, and soon swarmed about the schooner in hundreds. Hardly a half minute passed that one of the four Chinamen that were fishing did not signal a catch, and Charlie and Jim were kept busy with spade and gaff. By noon the deck-tubs were full. The lines were hauled in, and the hands set the tubs in the sun to try out the oil. Under the tropical heat the shark livers almost visibly melted away, and by four o'clock in the afternoon the tubs were full of a thick, yellow oil, the reek of which instantly recalled to Wilbur's mind the rancid smell of the schooner on the day when he had first come aboard of her. The deck-tubs were emptied into the hogsheads and vats that stood in the waist of the "Bertha," the tubs scoured, and the lines and bent shark-hooks overhauled. Charlie disappeared in the galley, supper was cooked, and eaten upon deck under the conflagration of the sunset; the lights were set, the Chinamen foregathered in the fo'c'stle head, smoking opium, and by eight o'clock the routine of the day was at an end.

So the time passed. In a short time Wilbur could not have said whether the day was Wednesday or Sunday. He soon tired of the unsportsmanlike work of killing the sluggish brutes, and turned shoreward to relieve the monotony of the succeeding days. He and Moran were left a good deal to their own devices. Charlie was the master of the men now. "Mate," said Moran to Wilbur one day, after a dinner of turtle steaks and fish, eaten in the open air on the quarterdeck; "mate, this is slow work, and the schooner smells terribly foul. We'll have the dory out and go ashore. We can tumble a cask into her and get some water. The butt's three-quarters empty. Let's see how it feels to be in Mexico."

"Mexico?" said Wilbur. "That's so—Lower California is Mexico. I'd forgotten that!"

They went ashore and spent the afternoon in filling the water-cask from the fresh-water stream and in gathering abalones, which Moran declared were delicious eating, from the rocks left bare by the tide. But nothing could have exceeded the loneliness of that

shore and backland, palpitating under the flogging of a tropical sun. Low hills of sand, covered with brush, stretched back from the shore. On the eastern horizon, leagues distant, blue masses of mountain striated with mirages swam in the scorching air.

The sand was like fire to the touch. Far out in the bay the schooner hung motionless under bare sticks, resting apparently upon her inverted shadow only. And that was all—the flat, heat-ridden land, the sheen of the open Pacific, and the lonely schooner.

"Quiet enough," said Wilbur, in a low voice, wondering if there was such a place as San Francisco, with its paved streets and cable cars, and if people who had been his friends there had ever had any real existence.

"Do you like it?" asked Moran quickly, facing him, her thumbs in her belt.

"It's good fun—how about you?"

"It's no different than the only life I've known. I suppose you think it's a queer kind of life for a girl. I've lived by doing things, not by thinking things, or reading about what other people have done or thought; and I guess it's what you do that counts, rather than what you think or read about. Where's that pinch-bar? We'll get a couple more abalones for supper, and then put off."

That was the only talk of moment they had during the afternoon. All the rest of their conversation had been of those things that immediately occupied their attention.

They regained the schooner toward five o'clock, to find the Chinamen perplexed and mystified. No explanation was forthcoming, and Charlie gave them supper in preoccupied silence. As they were eating the abalones, which Moran had fried in batter, Charlie said:

"Shark all gone! No more catch um—him all gone."

"Gone—why?"

"No savvy," said Charlie. "No likee, no likee. China boy tink um heap funny, too much heap funny."

It was true. During all the next day not a shark was in sight, and though the crew fished assiduously till dark, they were rewarded by not so much as a bite. No one could offer any explanation.

"'Tis strange," said Moran. "Never heard of shark leaving this feed before. And you can see with half an eye that the hands don't like the looks of it. Superstitious beggars! they need to be clumped in the head."

That same night Wilbur woke in his hammock on the fo'c'stle head about half-past two. The moon was down, the sky one powder of stars. There was not a breath of wind. It was so still that he could hear some large fish playing and breaking off toward the shore. Then, without the least warning, he felt the schooner begin to lift under him. He rolled out of his hammock and stood on the deck. There could be no doubt of it—the whole forepart was rising beneath him. He could see the bowsprit moving upward from star to star. Still the schooner lifted; objects on deck began to slide aft; the oil in the deck-tubs washed over; then, as there came a wild scrambling of the Chinese crew up the fo'c'stle hatch, she settled again gradually at first, then, with an abrupt lurch that almost threw him from his feet, regained her level. Moran met him in the waist. Charlie came running aft.

"What was that? Are we grounding? Has she struck?"

"No, no; we're still fast to the kelp. Was it a tidal wave?"

"Nonsense. It wouldn't have handled us that way."

"Well, what was it? Listen! For God's sake keep quiet there forward!"

Wilbur looked over the side into the water. The ripples were still chasing themselves away from the schooner. There was nothing else. The stillness shut down again. There was not a sound.

VI

A SEA MYSTERY

In spite of his best efforts at self-control, Wilbur felt a slow, cold clutch at his heart. That sickening, uncanny lifting of the schooner out of the glassy water, at a time when there was not enough wind to so much as wrinkle the surface, sent a creep of something very like horror through all his flesh.

Again he peered over the side, down into the kelp-thickened sea. Nothing—not a breath of air was stirring. The gray light that flooded down from the stars showed not a break upon the surface of Magdalena Bay. On shore, nothing moved.

"Quiet there, forward," called Moran to the shrill-voiced coolies.

The succeeding stillness was profound. All on board listened intently. The water dripped like the ticking of a clock from the "Bertha Millner's" stern, which with the rising of the bow had sunk almost to the rail. There was no other sound.

"Strange," muttered Moran, her brows contracting.

Charlie broke the silence with a wail: "No likee, no likee!" he cried at top voice.

The man had gone suddenly green; Wilbur could see the shine of his eyes distended like those of a harassed cat. As he, Moran, and Wilbur stood in the schooner's waist, staring at each other, the smell of punk came to their nostrils. Forward, the coolies were already burning joss-sticks on the fo'castle head, kowtowing their foreheads to the deck.

Moran went forward and kicked them to their feet and hurled their joss-sticks into the sea.

"Feng shui! Feng shui!" they exclaimed with bated breaths. "The Feng shui no likee we."

Low in the east the horizon began to blacken against the sky. It was early morning. A watch was set, the Chinamen sent below, and until daybreak, when Charlie began to make a clattering of tins in the galley as he set about preparing breakfast, Wilbur paced the rounds of the schooner, looking, listening, and waiting again

for that slow, horrifying lift. But the rest of the night was without incident.

After breakfast, the strangely assorted trio—Charlie, Moran, and Wilbur—held another conference in the cabin. It was decided to move the schooner to the other side of the bay.

"Feng shui in disa place, no likee we," announced Charlie.

"Feng shui, who are they?"

Charlie promptly became incoherent on this subject, and Moran and Wilbur could only guess that the Feng shui were the tutelary deities that presided over that portion of Magdalena Bay. At any rate, there were evidently no more shark to be caught in that fishing-ground; so sail was made, and by noon the "Bertha Millner" tied up to the kelp on the opposite side of the inlet, about half a mile from the shore.

The shark were plentiful here and the fishing went forward again as before. Certain of these shark were hauled aboard, stunned by a blow on the nose, and their fins cut off. The Chinamen packed these fins away in separate kegs. Eventually they would be sent to China.

Two or three days passed. The hands kept steadily at their work. Nothing more occurred to disturb the monotony of the scorching days and soundless nights; the schooner sat as easily on the unbroken water as though built to the bottom. Soon the night watch was discontinued. During these days the three officers lived high. Turtle were plentiful, and what with their steaks and soups, the fried abalones, the sea-fish, the really delicious shark-fins, and the quail that Charlie and Wilbur trapped along the shore, the trio had nothing to wish for in the way of table luxuries.

The shore was absolutely deserted, as well as the back country—an unbroken wilderness of sand and sage. Half a dozen times, Wilbur, wearying of his inaction aboard the schooner, made the entire circuit of the bay from point to point. Standing on one of the latter projections and looking out to the west, the Pacific appeared as empty of life as the land. Never a keel cut those waters, never a sail broke the edge of the horizon, never a feather of smoke spotted the sky where it whitened to meet the sea. Everything was empty—vast, unspeakably desolate—palpitating with heat.

Another week passed. Charlie began to complain that the shark were growing scarce again.

"I think bime-by him go away, once a mo'."

That same night, Wilbur, lying in his hammock, was awakened

by a touch on his arm. He woke to see Moran beside him on the deck.

"Did you hear anything?" she said in a low voice, looking at him under her scowl.

"No! no!" he exclaimed, getting up, reaching for his wicker sandals. "Did you?"

"I thought so—something. Did you feel anything?"

"I've been asleep, I haven't noticed anything. Is it beginning again?"

"The schooner lifted again, just now, very gently. I happened to be awake or I wouldn't have noticed it." They were talking in low voices, as is the custom of people speaking in the dark.

"There, what's that?" exclaimed Wilbur under his breath. A gentle vibration, barely perceptible, thrilled through the schooner. Under his hand, that was clasped upon the rail, Wilbur could feel a faint trembling in her frame. It stopped, began again, and died slowly away.

"Well, what the devil *is* it?" he muttered impatiently, trying to master the returning creep of dread.

Moran shook her head, biting her lip.

"It's beyond *me*," she said, frowning. "Can you see anything?" The sky, sea, and land were unbroken reaches of solitude. There was no breath of wind.

"Listen," said Moran. Far off to landward came the faint, sleepy clucking of a quail, and the stridulating of unnumbered crickets; a long ripple licked the slope of the beach and slid back into the ocean. Wilbur shook his head.

"Don't hear anything," he whispered. "Sh—there—she's trembling again."

Once more a prolonged but faint quivering ran through the "Bertha Millner" from stem to stern, and from keel to masthead. There was a barely audible creaking of joints and panels. The oil in the deck-tubs trembled. The vibration was so fine and rapid that it tickled the soles of Wilbur's feet as he stood on the deck.

"I'd give two fingers to know what it all means," murmured Moran in a low voice. "I've been to sea for—" Then suddenly she cried aloud: "Steady all, she's lifting again!"

The schooner heaved slowly under them, this time by the stern. Up she went, up and up, while Wilbur gripped at a stay to keep his place, and tried to choke down his heart, that seemed to beat against his palate.

"God!" ejaculated Moran, her eyes blazing. "This thing is—" The "Bertha" came suddenly down to an easy keel, rocking in that glassy sea as if in a tide rip. The deck was awash with oil. Far out in the bay the ripples widening from the schooner blurred the reflections of the stars. The Chinamen swarmed up the hatchway, voluble and shrill. Again the "Bertha Millner" lifted and sank, the tubs sliding on the deck, the masts quivering like reeds, the timbers groaning aloud with the strain. In the stern something cracked and smashed. Then the trouble died away, the ripples faded into the ocean, and the schooner settled to her keel, quite motionless.

"Look," said Moran, her face toward the "Bertha's" stern. "The rudder is out of the gudgeons." It was true—the "Bertha Millner's" helm was unshipped.

There was no more sleep for any one on board that night. Wilbur tramped the quarterdeck, sick with a feeling he dared not put a name to. Moran sat by the wrecked rudder-head, a useless pistol in her hand, swearing under her breath from time to time. Charlie appeared on the quarterdeck at intervals, looked at Wilbur and Moran with wide-open eyes, and then took himself away. On the forward deck the coolies pasted strips of red paper inscribed with mottoes upon the mast, and filled the air with the reek of their joss-sticks.

"If one could only *see* what it was," growled Moran between her clinched teeth. "But this—this damned heaving and trembling, it —it's queer."

"That's it, that's it," said Wilbur quickly, facing her. "What are we going to do, Moran?"

"*Stick it out!*" she exclaimed, striking her knee with her fist. "We can't leave the schooner—I *won't* leave her. I'll stay by this dough-dish as long as two planks in her hold together. Were you thinking of cutting away?" She fixed him with her frown.

Wilbur looked at her, sitting erect by the disabled rudder, her head bare, her braids of yellow hair hanging over her breast, sitting there in man's clothes and man's boots, the pistol at her side. He shook his head.

"I'm not leaving the 'Bertha' till you do," he answered; adding: "I'll stand by you, mate, until we—"

"Feel that?" said Moran, holding up a hand.

A fine, quivering tremble was thrilling through every beam of the schooner, vibrating each rope like a harp-string. It passed

away; but before either Wilbur or Moran could comment upon it recommenced, this time much more perceptibly. Charlie dashed aft, his queue flying.

"W'at makum heap shake?" he shouted; "w'at for him shake? No savvy, no likee, pretty much heap flaid; aie-yah, aie-yah!"

Slowly the schooner heaved up as though upon the crest of some huge wave, slowly it settled, and again gradually lifted till Wilbur had to catch at the rail to steady his footing. The quivering sensation increased so that their very teeth chattered with it. Below in the cabin they could hear small objects falling from the shelves and table. Then with a sudden drop the "Bertha" fell back to her keel again, the spilled oil spouting from her scuppers, the masts rocking, the water churning and splashing from her sides.

And that was all. There was no sound—nothing was in sight. There was only the frightened trembling of the little schooner and that long, slow heave and lift.

Morning came, and breakfast was had in silence and grim perplexity. It was too late to think of getting away, now that the rudder was disabled. The "Bertha Millner" must bide where she was.

"And a little more of this dancing," exclaimed Moran, "and we'll have the planks springing off the stern-post."

Charlie nodded solemnly. He said nothing—his gravity had returned. Now in the glare of the tropical day, with the "Bertha Millner" sitting the sea as placidly as a brooding gull, he was Talleyrand again.

"I tinkum yas," he said vaguely.

"Well, *I* think we had better try and fix the rudder and put back to Frisco," said Moran. "You're making no money this way. There are no shark to be caught. *Something's* wrong. They're gone away somewhere. The crew are eating their heads off and not earning enough money to pay for their keep. What do you think?"

"I tinkum yas."

"Then we'll go home. Is that it?"

"I tinkum yas—to-molla."

"To-morrow?"

"Yas."

"That's settled then," persisted Moran, surprised at his ready acquiescence; "we start home to-morrow?" Charlie nodded.

"To-molla," he said.

The rudder was not so badly damaged as they had at first sup-

posed; the break was easily mended, but it was found necessary for one of the men to go over the side.

"Get over the side here, Jim," commanded Moran. "Charlie, tell him what's wanted; we can't work the pintle in from the deck."

But Charlie shook his head.

"Him no likee go; him plenty much flaid."

Moran ripped out an oath.

"What do I care if he's afraid! I want him to shove the pintle into the lower gudgeon. My God," she exclaimed, with immense contempt, "what carrion! I'd sooner work a boat with she-monkeys. Mr. Wilbur, I shall have to ask you to go over. I thought I was captain here, but it all depends on whether these rats are afraid or not."

"Plenty many shark," expostulated Charlie. "Him flaid shark come back, catchum chop-chop."

"Stand by here with a couple of cutting-in spades," cried Moran, "and fend off if you see any shark; now, then, are you ready, mate?"

Wilbur took his determination in both hands, threw off his coat and sandals, and went over the stern rail.

"Put your ear to the water," called Moran from above; "sometimes you can hear their flukes."

It took but a minute to adjust the pintle, and Wilbur regained the deck again, dripping and a little pale. He knew not what horrid form of death might have been lurking for him down below there underneath the kelp. As he started forward for dry clothes he was surprised to observe that Moran was smiling at him, holding out her hand.

"That was well done," she said, "and thank you. I've seen older sailor-men than you who wouldn't have taken the risk." Never before had she appeared more splendid in his eyes than at this moment. After changing his clothes in the fo'castle, he sat for a long time, his chin in his hands, very thoughtful. Then at length, as though voicing the conclusion of his reflections, said aloud, as he rose to his feet:

"But, of course, *that* is out of the question."

He remembered that they were going home on the next day. Within a fortnight he would be in San Francisco again—a taxpayer, a police-protected citizen once more. It had been good fun, after all, this three weeks' life on the "Bertha Millner," a stronge episode cut out from the normal circle of his conventional life. He ran over the incidents of the cruise—Kitchell, the turtle hunt, the find-

ing of the derelict, the dead captain, the squall, and the awful sight of the sinking bark, Moran at the wheel, the grewsome business of the shark-fishing, and last of all that inexplicable lifting and quivering of the schooner. He told himself that now he would probably never know the explanation of that mystery.

The day passed in preparations to put to sea again. The deck-tubs and hogsheads were stowed below and the tackle cleared away. By evening all was ready; they would be under way by daybreak the next morning. There was a possibility of their being forced to tow the schooner out by means of the dory, so light were the airs inside. Once beyond the heads, however, they were sure of a breeze.

About ten o'clock that night, the same uncanny trembling ran through the schooner again, and about half an hour later she lifted gently once or twice. But after that she was undisturbed.

Later on in the night—or rather early in the morning—Wilbur woke suddenly in his hammock without knowing why, and got up and stood listening. The "Bertha Millner" was absolutely quiet. The night was hot and still; the new moon, canted over like a sinking galleon, was low over the horizon. Wilbur listened intently, for now at last he heard something.

Between the schooner and the shore a gentle sound of splashing came to his ears, and an occasional crack as of oars in their locks. Was it possible that a boat was there between the schooner and the land? What boat, and manned by whom?

The creaking of oarlocks and the dip of paddles was unmistakable.

Suddenly Wilbur raised his voice in a great shout:

"Boat ahoy!"

There was no answer; the noise of oars grew fainter. Moran came running out of her cabin, swinging into her coat as she ran.

"What is it—what is it?"

"A boat, I think, right off the schooner here. Hark—there—did you hear the oars?"

"You're right; call the hands, get the dory over, we'll follow that boat right up. Hello, forward there, Charlie, all hands, tumble out!"

Then Wilbur and Moran caught themselves looking into each other's eyes. At once something—perhaps the latent silence of the schooner—told them there was to be no answer. The two ran forward; Moran swung herself into the fo'castle hatch, and without

using the ladder dropped to the deck below. In an instant her voice came up the hatch:

"The bunks are empty—they're gone—abandoned us." She came up the ladder again.

"Look," said Wilbur, as she regained the deck. "The dory's gone; they've taken it. It was our only boat; *we* can't get ashore."

"Cowardly, superstitious rats, I should have expected this. They would be chopped in bits before they would stay longer on board this boat—they and their Feng shui."

When morning came the deserters could be made out camped on the shore, near to the beached dory. What their intentions were could not be conjectured. Ridden with all manner of nameless Oriental superstitions, it was evident that the Chinamen preferred any hazard of fortune to remaining longer upon the schooner.

"Well, can we get along without them?" said Wilbur. "Can we two work the schooner back to port ourselves?"

"We'll try it on, anyhow, mate," said Moran; "we might get her into San Diego, anyhow."

The Chinamen had left plenty of provisions on board, and Moran cooked breakfast. Fortunately, by eight o'clock a very light westerly breeze came up. Moran and Wilbur cast off the gaskets and set the fore and main sails.

Wilbur was busy at the forward bitts preparing to cast loose from the kelp, and Moran had taken up her position at the wheel, when suddenly she exclaimed:

"Sail ho!—and in God's name what kind of a sail do you call it?"

In fact a strange-looking craft had just made her appearance at the entrance of Magdalena Bay.

VII

BEACH-COMBERS

Wilbur returned aft and joined Moran on the quarterdeck. She was already studying the stranger through the glass.

"That's a new build of boat to me," she muttered, giving Wilbur the glass. Wilbur looked long and carefully. The newcomer was of the size and much the same shape as a caravel of the fifteenth century—high as to bow and stern, and to all appearances as seaworthy as a soup-tureen. Never but in the old prints had Wilbur seen such an extraordinary boat. She carried a single mast, which listed forward; her lugsail was stretched upon dozens of bamboo yards; she drew hardly any water. Two enormous red eyes were painted upon either side of her high, blunt bow, while just abaft the waist projected an enormous oar, or sweep, full forty feet in length—longer, in fact, than the vessel herself. It acted partly as a propeller, partly as a rudder.

"They're heading for us," commented Wilbur as Moran took the glass again.

"Right," she answered; adding upon the moment: "Huh! more Chinamen; the thing is alive with coolies; she's a junk."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wilbur, recollecting some talk of Charlie's he had overheard. "I know."

"You know?"

"Yes; these are real beach-combers. I've heard of them along this coast—heard our Chinamen speak of them. They beach that junk every night and camp on shore. They're scavengers, as you might say—pick up what they can find or plunder along shore—abalones, shark-fins, pickings of wrecks, old brass and copper, seals, perhaps, turtle and shell. Between whiles they fish for shrimp, and I've heard Kitchell tell how they make pearls by dropping bird-shot into oysters. They are Kai-gingh to a man, and, according to Kitchell, the wickedest breed of cats that ever cut teeth."

The junk bore slowly down upon the schooner. In a few moments she had hove to alongside. But for the enormous red eyes

upon her bow she was innocent of paint. She was grimed and shellacked with dirt and grease, and smelled abominably. Her crew were Chinamen; but such Chinamen! The coolies of the "Bertha Millner" were pampered and effete in comparison. The beach-combers, thirteen in number, were a smaller class of men, their faces almost black with tan and dirt. Though they still wore the queue, their heads were not shaven, and mats and mops of stiff black hair fell over their eyes from under their broad, basket-shaped hats.

They were barefoot. None of them wore more than two garments—the jeans and the blouse. They were the lowest type of men Wilbur had ever seen. The faces were those of a higher order of anthropoid apes: the lower portion—jaws, lips, and teeth—salient; the nostrils opening at almost right angles, the eyes tiny and bright, the forehead seamed and wrinkled—unnaturally old. Their general expression was of simian cunning and a ferocity that was utterly devoid of courage.

"Aye!" exclaimed Moran between her teeth, "if the devil were a shepherd, here are his sheep. You don't come aboard this schooner, my friends! I want to live as long as I can, and die when I can't help it. Boat ahoy!" she called.

An answer in Cantonese sing-song came back from the junk, and the speaker gestured toward the outside ocean.

Then a long parleying began. For upward of half an hour Moran and Wilbur listened to a proposition in broken pigeon English made by the beach-combers again and again and yet again, and were in no way enlightened. It was impossible to understand. Then at last they made out that there was question of a whale. Next it appeared the whale was dead; and finally, after a prolonged pantomime of gesturing and pointing, Moran guessed that the beach-combers wanted the use of the "Bertha Millner" to trice up the dead leviathan while the oil and whalebone were extracted.

"That must be it," she said to Wilbur. "That's what they mean by pointing to our masts and tackle. You see, they couldn't manage with that stick of theirs, and they say they'll give us a third of the loot. We'll do it, mate, and I'll tell you why. The wind has fallen, and they can tow us out. If it's a sperm-whale they've found, there ought to be thirty or forty barrels of oil in him, let alone the blubber and bone. Oil is at $50 now, and spermaceti will always bring $100. We'll take it on, mate, but we'll keep our eyes on the rats all the time. I don't want them aboard at all. Look at

their belts. Not three out of the dozen who aren't carrying those filthy little hatchets. Faugh!" she exclaimed, with a shudder of disgust. "Such vipers!"

What followed proved that Moran had guessed correctly. A rope was passed to the "Bertha Millner," the junk put out its sweeps, and to a wailing, eldrich chanting the schooner was towed out of the bay.

"I wonder what Charlie and our China boys will think of this?" said Wilbur, looking shoreward, where the deserters could be seen gathered together in a silent, observing group.

"We're well shut of them," growled Moran, her thumbs in her belt. "Only, now we'll never know what was the matter with the schooner these last few nights. Hah!" she exclaimed under her breath, her scowl thickening, "sometimes I don't wonder the beasts cut."

The dead whale was lying four miles out of the entrance of Magdalena Bay, and as the junk and the schooner drew near seemed like a huge black boat floating bottom up. Over it and upon it swarmed and clambered thousands of sea-birds, while all around and below the water was thick with gorging sharks. A dreadful, strangling decay fouled all the air.

The whale was a sperm-whale, and fully twice the length of the "Bertha Millner." The work of tricing him up occupied the beach-combers throughout the entire day. It was out of the question to keep them off the schooner, and Wilbur and Moran were too wise to try. They swarmed the forward deck and rigging like a plague of unclean monkeys, climbing with an agility and nimbleness that made Wilbur sick to his stomach. They were unlike any Chinamen he had ever seen—hideous to a degree that he had imagined impossible in a human being. On two occasions a fight developed, and in an instant the little hatchets were flashing like the flash of a snake's fangs. Toward the end of the day one of them returned to the junk, screaming like a stuck pig, a bit of his chin bitten off.

Moran and Wilbur kept to the quarter-deck, always within reach of the huge cutting-in spades, but the Chinese beach-combers were too elated over their prize to pay them much attention.

And indeed the dead monster proved a veritable treasure-trove. By the end of the day he had been triced up to the foremast, and all hands straining at the windlass had raised the mighty head out of

the water. The Chinamen descended upon the smooth, black body, their bare feet sliding and slipping at every step. They held on by jabbing their knives into the hide as glacier-climbers do their ice-picks. The head yielded barrel after barrel of oil and a fair quantity of bone. The blubber was taken aboard the junk, minced up with hatchets, and run into casks.

Last of all, a Chinaman cut a hole through the "case," and, actually descending into the inside of the head, stripped away the spermaceti (clear as crystal), and packed it into buckets, which were hauled up on the junk's deck. The work occupied some two or three days. During this time the "Bertha Millner" was keeled over to nearly twenty degrees by the weight of the dead monster. However, neither Wilbur nor Moran made protest. The Chinamen would do as they pleased; that was said and signed. And they did not release the schooner until the whale had been emptied of oil and blubber, spermaceti and bone.

At length, on the afternoon of the third day, the captain of the junk, whose name was Hoang, presented himself upon the quarter-deck. He was naked to the waist, and his bare brown torso was gleaming with oil and sweat. His queue was coiled like a snake around his neck, his hatchet thrust into his belt.

"Well?" said Moran, coming up.

Wilbur caught his breath as the two stood there facing each other, so sharp was the contrast. The man, the Mongolian, small, weazened, leather-colored, secretive—a strange, complex creature, steeped in all the obscure mystery of the East, nervous, ill at ease; and the girl, the Anglo-Saxon, daughter of the Northmen, huge, blond, big-boned, frank, outspoken, simple of composition, open as the day, bareheaded, her great ropes of sandy hair falling over her breast and almost to the top of her knee-boots. As he looked at the two, Wilbur asked himself where else but in California could such abrupt contrasts occur.

"All light," announced Hoang; "catchum all oil, catchum all bone, catchum all same plenty many. You help catchum, now you catchum pay. Sabe?"

The three principals came to a settlement with unprecedented directness. Like all Chinamen, Hoang was true to his promises, and he had already set apart three and a half barrels of spermaceti, ten barrels of oil, and some twenty pounds of bone as the schooner's share in the transaction. There was no discussion over the matter. He called their attention to the discharge of his obligations, and

hurried away to summon his men aboard and get the junk under way again.

The beach-combers returned to their junk, and Wilbur and Moran set about cutting the carcass of the whale adrift. They found it would be easier to cut away the hide from around the hooks and loops of the tackle than to unfasten the tackle itself.

"The knots are jammed hard as steel," declared Moran. "Hand up that cutting-in spade; stand by with the other and cut loose at the same time as I do, so we can ease off the strain on these lines at the same time. Ready there, cut!" Moran set free the hook in the loop of black skin in a couple of strokes, but Wilbur was more clumsy; the skin resisted. He struck at it sharply with the heavy spade; the blade hit the iron hook, glanced off, and opened a large slit in the carcass below the head. A gush of entrails started from the slit, and Moran swore under her breath.

"Ease away, quick there! You'll have the mast out of her next —steady! Hold your spade—what's that?"

Wilbur had nerved himself against the dreadful stench he expected would issue from the putrid monster, but he was surprised to note a pungent, sweet, and spicy odor that all at once made thick the air about him. It was an aromatic smell, stronger than that of the salt ocean, stronger even than the reek of oil and blubber from the schooner's waist—sweet as incense, penetrating as attar, delicious as a summer breeze.

"It smells pretty good, whatever it is," he answered. Moran came up to where he stood, and looked at the slit he had made in the whale's carcass. Out of it was bulging some kind of dull white matter marbled with gray. It was a hard lump of irregular shape and about as big as a hogshead.

Moran glanced over to the junk, some forty feet distant. The beach-combers were hoisting the lug-sail. Hoang was at the steering oar.

"Get that stuff aboard," she commanded quietly.

"That!" exclaimed Wilbur, pointing to the lump.

Moran's blue eyes were beginning to gleam.

"Yes, and do it before the Chinamen see you."

"But—but I don't understand."

Moran stepped to the quarterdeck, unslung the hammock in which Wilbur slept, and tossed it to him.

"Reeve it up in that; I'll pass you a line, and we'll haul it aboard.

Godsend, those vermin yonder have got smells enough of their own without noticing this. Hurry, mate, I'll talk afterward."

Wilbur went over the side, and standing as best he could upon the slippery carcass, dug out the lump and bound it up in the hammock.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Moran, with sudden exultation. "There's a lot of it. That's the biggest lump yet, I'll be bound. Is that all there is, mate?—look carefully." Her voice had dropped to a whisper.

"Yes, yes; that's all. Careful now when you haul up—Hoang has got his eye on you, and so have the rest of them. What do you call it, anyhow? Why are you so particular about it? Is it worth anything?"

"I don't know—perhaps. We'll have a look at it, anyway."

Moran hauled the stuff aboard, and Wilbur followed.

"Whew!" he exclaimed with half-closed eyes. "It's like the story of Samson and the dead lion—the sweet coming forth from the strong."

The schooner seemed to swim in a bath of perfumed air; the membrane of the nostrils fairly prinkled with the sensation. Moran unleashed the hammock, and going down upon one knee examined the lump attentively.

"It didn't seem possible," Wilbur heard her saying to herself; "but there can't be any mistake. It's the stuff, right enough. I've heard of such things, but this—but this—" She rose to her feet, tossing back her hair.

"Well," said Wilbur, "what do you call it?"

"The thing to do now," returned Moran, "is to get clear of here as quietly and as quickly as we can, and take this stuff with us. I can't stop to explain now, but it's big—it's big. Mate, it's big as the Bank of England."

"Those beach-combers are right on to the game, I'm afraid," said Wilbur. "Look, they're watching us. This stuff would smell across the ocean."

"Rot the beach-combers! There's a bit of wind, thank God, and we can do four knots to their one, just let us get clear once."

Moran dragged the hammock back into the cabin, and, returning upon deck, helped Wilbur to cut away the last tricing tackle. The schooner righted slowly to an even keel. Meanwhile the junk had set its one lug-sail and its crew had run out the sweeps. Hoang took the steering sweep and worked the junk to a position right across the "Bertha's" bows, some fifty feet ahead.

"They're watching us, right enough," said Wilbur.

"Up your mains'l," ordered Moran. The pair set the fore and main sails with great difficulty. Moran took the wheel and Wilbur went forward to cast off the line by which the schooner had been tied up to one of the whale's flukes.

"Cut it!" cried the girl. "Don't stop to cast off."

There was a hail from the beach-combers; the port sweeps dipped and the junk bore up nearer.

"Hurry!" shouted Moran, "don't mind them. Are we clear for'ard—what's the trouble? Something's holding her." The schooner listed slowly to starboard and settled by the head.

"All clear!" cried Wilbur.

"There's something wrong!" exclaimed Moran; "she's settling for'ard." Hoang hailed the schooner a second time.

"We're still settling," called Wilbur from the bows, "what's the matter?"

"Matter that she's taking water," answered Moran wrathfully. "She's started something below, what with all that lifting and dancing and tricing up."

Wilbur ran back to the quarterdeck.

"This is a bad fix," he said to Moran. "Those chaps are coming aboard again. They're on to something, and, of course, at just this moment she begins to leak."

"They are after that ambergris," said Moran between her teeth. "Smelled it, of course—the swine!"

"Ambergris?"

"The stuff we found in the whale. That's ambergris."

"Well?"

"Well!" shouted Moran, exasperated. "Do you know that we have found a lump that will weigh close to 250 pounds, and do you know that ambergris is selling in San Francisco at $40 an ounce? Do you know that we have picked up nearly $150,000 right out here in the ocean and are in a fair way to lose it all?"

"Can't we run for it?"

"Run for it in a boat that's taking water like a sack! Our dory's gone. Suppose we get clear of the junk, and the 'Bertha' sank? Then what? If we only had our crew aboard; if we were only ten to their dozen—if we were only six—by Jupiter! I'd fight them for it."

The two enormous red eyes of the junk loomed alongside and

stared over into the "Bertha's" waist. Hoang and seven of the coolies swarmed aboard.

"What now?" shouted Moran, coming forward to meet them, her scowl knotting her flashing eyes together. "Is this ship yours or mine? We've done your dirty work for you. I want you clear of my deck." Wilbur stood at her side, uncertain what to do, but ready for anything she should attempt.

"I tink you catchum someting, smellum pretty big," said Hoang, his ferret glance twinkling about the schooner.

"I catchum nothing—nothing but plenty bad stink," said Moran. "No, you don't!" she exclaimed, putting herself in Hoang's way as he made for the cabin. The other beach-combers came crowding up; Wilbur even thought he saw one of them loosening his hatchet in his belt.

"This ship's mine," cried Moran, backing to the cabin door. Wilbur followed her, and the Chinamen closed down upon the pair.

"It's not much use, Moran," he muttered. "They'll rush us in a minute."

"But the ambergris is mine—is mine," she answered, never taking her eyes from the confronting coolies.

"We findum w'ale," said Hoang; "you no find w'ale; him b'long to we—eve'yt'ing in um w'ale b'long to we, savvy?"

"No, you promised us a third of everything you found."

Even in the confusion of the moment it occurred to Wilbur that it was quite possible that at least two-thirds of the ambergris did belong to the beach-combers by right of discovery. After all, it was the beach-combers who had found the whale. He could never remember afterward whether or no he said as much to Moran at the time. If he did, she had been deaf to it. A fury of wrath and desperation suddenly blazed in her blue eyes. Standing at her side, Wilbur could hear her teeth grinding upon each other. She was blind to all danger, animated only by a sense of injustice and imposition.

Hoang uttered a sentence in Cantonese. One of the coolies jumped forward, and Moran's fist met him in the face and brought him to his knees. Then came the rush Wilbur had foreseen. He had just time to catch a sight of Moran at grapples with Hoang when a little hatchet glinted over his head. He struck out savagely into the thick of the group—and then opened his eyes to find Moran washing the blood from his hair as he lay on the deck with his head

in the hollow of her arm. Everything was quiet. The beach-combers were gone.

"Hello, what—what—what is it?" he asked, springing to his feet, his head swimming and smarting. "We had a row, didn't we? Did they hurt you? Oh, I remember; I got a cut over the head—one of their hatchet men. Did they hurt you?"

"They got the loot," she growled. "Filthy vermin! And just to make everything pleasant, the schooner's sinking."

VIII

A RUN FOR LAND

"SINKING!" exclaimed Wilbur,

Moran was already on her feet. "We'll have to beach her," she cried, "and we're six miles out. Up y'r jib, mate!" The two set the jib, flying-jib, and staysails.

The fore and main sails were already drawing, and under all the spread of her canvas the "Bertha" raced back toward the shore.

But by the time she was within the head of the bay her stern had settled to such an extent that the forefoot was clear of the water, the bowsprit pointing high into the heavens. Moran was at the wheel, her scowl thicker than ever, her eyes measuring the stretch of water that lay between the schooner and the shore.

"She'll never make it in God's world," she muttered as she listened to the wash of the water in the cabin under her feet. In the hold, empty barrels were afloat, knocking hollowly against each other. "We're in a bad way, mate."

"If it comes to that," returned Wilbur, surprised to see her thus easily downcast, who was usually so indomitable—"if it comes to that, we can swim for it—a couple of planks—"

"Swim?" she echoed; "I'm not thinking of that; of course we could swim."

"What then?'

"The sharks!"

Wilbur's teeth clicked sharply together. He could think of nothing to say.

As the water gained between decks the schooner's speed dwindled, and at the same time as she approached the shore the wind, shut off by the land, fell away. By this time the ocean was not four inches below the stern-rail. Two miles away was the nearest sand-spit. Wilbur broke out a distress signal on the foremast, in the hope that Charlie and the deserters might send off the dory to their assistance. But the deserters were nowhere in sight.

"What became of the junk?" he demanded suddenly of Moran. She motioned to the westward with her head. "Still lying outside."

Twenty minutes passed. Once only Moran spoke.

"When she begins to go," she said, "she'll go with a rush. Jump pretty wide, or you'll get caught in the suction."

The two had given up all hope. Moran held grimly to the wheel as a mere matter of form. Wilbur stood at her side, his clinched fists thrust into his pockets. The eyes of both were fixed on the yellow line of the distant beach. By and by Moran turned to him with an odd smile.

"We're a strange pair to die together," she said. Wilbur met her eyes an instant, but finding no reply, put his chin in the air as though he would have told her she might well say that.

"A strange pair to die together," Moran repeated; "but we can do that better than we could have"—she looked away from him—"could have *lived* together," she finished, and smiled again.

"And yet," said Wilbur, "these last few weeks here on board the schooner, we have been through a good deal—together. I don't know," he went on clumsily, "I don't know when I've been—when I've had—I've been happier than these last weeks. It *is* queer, isn't it? I know, of course, what you'll say. I've said it to myself often of late. *I* belong to the city and to my life there, and you—you belong to the ocean. I never knew a girl like you—never knew a girl *could* be like you. You don't know how extraordinary it all seems to me. You swear like a man, and you dress like a man, and I don't suppose you've ever been associated with other women; and you're strong—I know you are as strong as I am. You have no idea how different you are to the kind of girl I've known. Imagine my kind of girl standing up before Hoang and those cutthroat beach-combers with their knives and hatchets. Maybe it's because you are so unlike my kind of girl that—that things are as they are with me. *I* don't know. It's a queer situation. A month or so ago I was at a tea in San Francisco, and now I'm aboard a shark-fishing schooner sinking in Magdalena Bay; and I'm with a girl that—that—that I—well, I'm with *you*, and, well, *you* know how it is—I might as well say it—I love you more than I imagined I ever could love a girl."

Moran's frown came back to her forehead.

"I don't like that kind of talk," she said; "I am not used to it, and I don't know how to take it. Believe me," she said with a half

laugh, "it's all wasted. *I* never could love a man. I'm not made for men."

"No," said Wilbur, "nor for other women either."

"Nor for other women either."

Wilbur fell silent. In that instant he had a distinct vision of Moran's life and character, shunning men and shunned of women, a strange, lonely creature, solitary as the ocean whereon she lived, beautiful after her fashion; as yet without sex, proud, untamed, splendid in her savage, primal independence—a thing untouched and unsullied by civilization. She seemed to him some Bradamante, some mythical Brunhilde, some Valkyrie of the legends, born out of season, lost and unfamiliar in this end-of-the-century time. Her purity was the purity of primeval glaciers. He could easily see how to such a girl the love of a man would appear only in the light of a humiliation—a degradation. And yet she *could* love, else how had *he* been able to love her? Wilbur found himself—even at that moment—wondering how the thing could be done—wondering to just what note the untouched cords would vibrate. Just how she should be awakened one morning to find that she—Moran, sea-rover, virgin unconquered, without law, without land, without sex—was, after all, a woman.

"By God, mate!" she exclaimed of a sudden. "The barrels are keeping us up—the empty barrels in the hold. Hoh! we'll make land yet."

It was true. The empty hogsheads, destined for the storage of oil, had been forced up by the influx of the water to the roof of the hold, and were acting as so many buoys—the schooner could sink no lower. An hour later, the quarterdeck all awash, her bow thrown high into the air, listing horribly to starboard, the "Bertha Millner" took ground on the shore of Magdalena Bay at about the turn of the tide.

Moran swung herself over the side, hip deep in the water, and, wading ashore with a line, made fast to the huge skull of a whale half buried in the sand at that point.

Wilbur followed. The schooner had grounded upon the southern horn of the bay and lay easily on a spit of sand. They could not examine the nature of the leak until low water the next morning.

"Well, here we are," said Moran, her thumbs in her belt. "What next? We may be here for two days, we *may* be here for two years. It all depends upon how bad a hole she has. Have we 'put in for

repairs,' or have we been cast away? Can't tell till to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I'm hungry."

Half of the stores of the schooner were water-soaked, but upon examination Wilbur found that enough remained intact to put them beyond all fear for the present.

"There's plenty of water up the creek," he said, "and we can snare all the quail we want; and then there's the fish and abalone. Even if the stores were gone we could make out very well."

The schooner's cabin was full of water and Wilbur's hammock was gone, so the pair decided to camp on shore. In that torrid weather to sleep in the open air was a luxury.

In great good spirits the two sat down to their first meal on land. Moran cooked a supper that, barring the absence of coffee, was delicious. The whiskey was had from aboard, and they pledged each other, standing up, in something over two stiff fingers.

"Moran," said Wilbur, "you ought to have been born a man."

"At all events, mate," she said—"at all events, I'm not a girl."

"*No!*" exclaimed Wilbur, as he filled his pipe. "*No,* you're just Moran, Moran of the 'Lady Letty.'"

"And I'll stay that, too," she said decisively.

Never had an evening been more beautiful in Wilbur's eyes. There was not a breath of air. The stillness was so profound that the faint murmur of the blood behind the ear-drums became an oppression. The ocean tiptoed toward the land with tiny rustling steps. The west was one gigantic stained window, the ocean floor a solid shimmer of opalescence. Behind them, sullen purples marked the horizon, hooded with mountain crests, and after a long while the moon shrugged a gleaming shoulder into view.

Wilbur, dressed in Chinese jeans and blouse, with Chinese wicker sandals on his bare feet, sat with his back against the whale's skull, smoking quietly. For a long time there was no conversation; then at last:

"No," said Moran in a low voice. "This is the life I'm made for. In six years I've not spent three consecutive weeks on land. Now that Eilert" (she always spoke of her father by his first name), "now that Eilert is dead, I've not a tie, not a relative, not even a friend, and I don't wish it.

"But the loneliness of the life, the solitude," said Wilbur, "that's what I don't understand. Did it ever occur to you that the best happiness is the happiness that one shares?"

Moran clasped a knee in both hands and looked out to sea. She

never wore a hat, and the red light of the afterglow was turning her rye-hued hair to saffron.

"Hoh!" she exclaimed, her heavy voice pitched even lower than usual. "Who could understand or share any of my pleasures, or be happy when I'm happy? And, besides, I'm happiest when I'm alone—I don't want any one."

"But," hesitated Wilbur, "one is not always alone. After all, you *are* a girl, and men, sailormen especially, are beasts when it's a question of a woman—an unprotected woman."

"I'm stronger than most men," said Moran simply. "If you, for instance, had been like some men, I should have fought you. It wouldn't have been the first time," she added, smoothing one huge braid between her palms.

Wilbur looked at her with intent curiosity—noted again, as if for the first time, the rough, blue overalls thrust into the shoes; the coarse flannel shirt open at the throat; the belt with its sheath-knife; her arms big and white and tattooed in sailor fashion; her thick, muscular neck; her red face, with its pale blue eyes and almost massive jaw; and her hair, her heavy, yellow, fragrant hair, that lay over her shoulder and breast, coiling and looping in her lap.

"No," he said, with a long breath, "I don't make it out. I knew you were out of my experience, but I begin to think now that you are out of even my imagination. You are right, you *should* keep to yourself. You should be alone—your mate isn't made yet. You are splendid just as you are," while under his breath he added, his teeth clinching, "and God! but I love you."

It was growing late, the stars were all out, the moon riding high. Moran yawned:

"Mate, I think I'll turn in. We'll have to be at that schooner early in the morning, and I make no doubt she'll give us plenty to do." Wilbur hesitated to reply, waiting to take his cue from what next she should say. "It's hot enough to sleep where we are," she added, "without going aboard the 'Bertha,' though we might have a couple of blankets off to lie on. This sand's as hard as a plank."

Without answering, Wilbur showed her a couple of blanket-rolls he had brought off while he was unloading part of the stores that afternoon. They took one apiece and spread them on the sand by the bleached whale's skull. Moran pulled off her boots and stretched herself upon her blanket with absolute unconcern, her hands clasped under her head. Wilbur rolled up his coat for a

pillow and settled himself for the night with an assumed self-possession. There was a long silence. Moran yawned again.

"I pulled the heel off my boot this morning," she said lazily, "and I've been limping all day."

"I noticed it," answered Wilbur. "Kitchell had a new pair aboard somewhere, if they're not spoiled by the water now."

"Yes?" she said indifferently; "we'll look them up in the morning."

Again there was silence.

"I wonder," she began again, staring up into the dark, "if Charlie took that frying-pan off with him when he went?"

"I don't know. He probably did."

"It was the only thing we had to cook abalones in. Make me think to look into the galley to-morrow. . . . This ground's as hard as nails, for all your blankets. . . . Well, good-night, mate; I'm going to sleep."

"Good-night, Moran."

Three hours later Wilbur, who had not closed his eyes, sat up and looked at Moran, sleeping quietly, her head in a pale glory of hair; looked at her, and then around him at the silent, deserted land.

"I don't know," he said to himself. "Am I a right-minded man and a thoroughbred, or a mush-head, or merely a prudent, sensible sort of chap that values his skin and bones? I'd be glad to put a name to myself." Then, more earnestly he added: "Do I love her too much, or not enough, or love her the wrong way, or how?" He leaned toward her, so close that he could catch the savor of her breath and the smell of her neck, warm with sleep. The sleeve of the coarse blue shirt was drawn up, and it seemed to him as if her bare arm, flung out at full length, had some sweet aroma of its own. Wilbur drew softly back.

"No," he said to himself decisively; "no, I guess I *am* a thoroughbred after all." It was only then that he went to sleep.

When he awoke the sea was pink with the sunrise, and one of the bay heads was all distorted and stratified by a mirage. It was hot already. Moran was sitting a few paces from him, braiding her hair.

"Hello, Moran!" he said, rousing up; "how long have you been up?"

"Since before sunrise," she said; "I've had a bath in the cove where the creek runs down. I saw a jack-rabbit."

"Seen anything of Charlie and the others?"

"They've camped on the other side of the bay. But look yonder," she added.

The junk had come in overnight, and was about a mile and a half from shore.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Wilbur. "What are they after?"

"Fresh water, I guess," said Moran, knotting the end of a braid. "We'd better have breakfast in a hurry, and turn to on the 'Bertha.' The tide is going out fast."

While they breakfasted they kept an eye on the schooner, watching her sides and flanks as the water fell slowly away.

"Don't see anything very bad yet," said Wilbur.

"It's somewhere in her stern," remarked Moran.

In an hour's time the "Bertha Millner" was high and dry, and they could examine her at their leisure. It was Moran who found the leak.

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, with a half-laugh, "we can stick that up in half an hour."

A single plank had started away from the stern-post; that was all. Otherwise the schooner was as sound as the day she left San Francisco. Moran and Wilbur had the damage repaired by noon, nailing the plank into its place and caulking the seams with lamp-wick. Nor could their most careful search discover any further injury.

"We're ready to go," said Moran, "so soon as she'll float. We can dig away around the bows here, make fast a line to that rock out yonder, and warp her off at next high tide. Hello! who's this?"

It was Charlie. While the two had been at work, he had come around the shore unobserved, and now stood at some little distance, smiling at them calmly.

"Well, what do you want?" cried Moran angrily. "If you had your rights, my friend, you'd be keelhauled."

"I tink um velly hot day."

"You didn't come here to say that. What do you want?"

"I come hab talkee-talk."

"We don't want to have any talkee-talk with such vermin as you. Get out!"

Charlie sat down on the beach and wiped his forehead.

"I come buy one-piecee bacon. China boy no hab got."

"We aren't selling bacon to deserters," cried Moran; "and I'll

tell you this, you filthy little monkey: Mr. Wilbur and I are going home—back to 'Frisco—this afternoon; and we're going to leave you and the rest of your vipers to rot on this beach, or to be murdered by beach-combers," and she pointed out toward the junk. Charlie did not even follow the direction of her gesture, and from this very indifference Wilbur guessed that it was precisely because of the beach-combers that the Machiavellian Chinaman had wished to treat with his old officers.

"No hab got bacon?" he queried, lifting his eyebrows in surprise.

"Plenty; but not for you."

Charlie took a buckskin bag from his blouse and counted out a handful of silver and gold.

"I buy um nisi two-piecee tobacco."

"Look here," said Wilbur deliberately; "don't you try to flim-flam us, Charlie. We know you too well. You don't want bacon and you don't want tobacco."

"China boy heap plenty much sick. Two boy velly sick. I tink um die pretty soon to-molla. You catch um slop-chest; you gib me five, seven liver pill. Sabe?"

"I'll tell you what you want," cried Moran, aiming a forefinger at him, pistol fashion; "you've got a blue funk because those Kaigingh beach-combers have come into the bay, and you're more frightened of them than you are of the schooner; and now you want us to take you home."

"How muchee?"

"A thousand dollars."

Wilbur looked at her in surprise. He had expected a refusal.

"You no hab got liver pill?" inquired Charlie blandly.

Moran turned her back on him. She and Wilbur conferred in a low voice.

"We'd better take them back, if we decently can," said Moran. "The schooner is known, of course, in 'Frisco. She went out with Kitchell and a crew of coolies, and she comes back with you and I aboard, and if we tell the truth about it, it will sound like a lie, and we'll have no end of trouble. Then again, can just you and I work the 'Bertha' into port? In these kind of airs it's plain work, but suppose we have dirty weather? I'm not so sure."

"I gib you ten dollah fo' ten liver pill," said Charlie.

"Will you give us a thousand dollars to set you down in San Francisco?"

Charlie rose. "I go back. I tell um China boy what you say 'bout liver pill. Bime-by I come back."

"That means he'll take our offer back to his friends," said Wilbur, in a low voice. "You best hurry chop-chop," he called after Charlie; "we go home pretty soon!"

"He knows very well we can't get away before high tide to-morrow," said Moran. "He'll take his time."

Later on in the afternoon Moran and Wilbur saw a small boat put off from the junk and make a landing by the creek. The beach-combers were taking on water. The boat made three trips before evening, but the beach-combers made no show of molesting the undefended schooner, or in any way interfering with Charlie's camp on the other side of the bay.

"No!" exclaimed Moran between her teeth, as she and Wilbur were cooking supper; "no, they don't need to; they've got about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars of loot on board—*our* loot, too! Good God! it goes against the grain!"

The moon rose considerably earlier that night, and by twelve o'clock the bay was flooded with its electrical whiteness. Wilbur and Moran could plainly make out the junk tied up to the kelp off-shore. But toward one o'clock Wilbur was awakened by Moran shaking his arm.

"There's something wrong out there," she whispered; "something wrong with the junk. Hear 'em squealing? Look! look! look!" she cried of a sudden; "it's their turn now!"

Wilbur could see the crank junk, with its staring red eyes, high stern and prow, as distinctly as though at noonday. As he watched, it seemed as if a great wave caught her suddenly underfoot. She heaved up bodily out of the water, dropped again with a splash, rose again, and again fell back into her own ripples, that, widening from her sides, broke crisply on the sand at Wilbur's feet.

Then the commotion ceased abruptly. The bay was quiet again. An hour passed, then two.. The moon began to set. Moran and Wilbur, wearied of watching, had turned in again, when they were startled to wakefulness by the creak of oarlocks and the sound of a boat grounding in the sand.

The coolies—the deserters from the "Bertha Millner"—were there. Charlie came forward.

"Ge' lup! Ge' lup!" he said. "Junk all smash! Kai-gingh come ashore. I tink him want catch um schooner."

IX

THE CAPTURE OF HOANG

"WHAT smashed the junk? What wrecked her?" demanded Moran.

The deserting Chinamen huddled around Charlie, drawing close, as if finding comfort in the feel of each other's elbows.

"No can tell," answered Charlie. "Him shake, then lif' up all the same as we. Bime-by too much lif' up; him smash all to—Four-piecee Chinamen dlown."

"Drown! Did any of them drown?" exclaimed Moran.

"Four-piecee dlown," reiterated Charlie calmly. "One, thlee, five, nine, come asho'. Him other no come."

"Where are the ones that came ashore?" asked Wilbur.

Charlie waved a hand back into the night. "Him make um camp topside ole house."

"That old whaling-camp," prompted Moran. Then to Wilbur: "You remember—about a hundred yards north the creek?"

Wilbur, Moran and Charlie had drawn off a little from the "Bertha Millner's" crew. The latter squatted in a line along the shore—silent, reserved, looking vaguely seaward through the night. Moran spoke again, her scowl thickening:

"What makes you think the beach-combers want our schooner?"

"Him catch um schooner sure! Him want um boat to go home. No can get."

"Let's put off to-night—right away," said Wilbur.

"Low tide," answered Moran; "and besides—Charlie, did you see them close? Were you near them?"

"No go muchee close."

"Did they have something with them, reeved up in a hammock—something that smelled sweet?"

"Like a joss-stick, for instance?"

"No savvy; no can tell. Him try catch um schooner sure. Him velly bad China boy. See Yup China boy, velly bad. I b'long Sam Yup. Savvy?"

"Ah! the Tongs?"

"Yas. I Sam Yup. Him," and he pointed to the "Bertha's" crew, "Sam Yup. All we Sam Yup; nisi him," and he waved a hand toward the beach-combers' camp; "him See Yup. Savvy?"

"It's a Tong row," said Wilbur. "They're blood enemies, the See Yups and Sam Yups."

Moran fell thoughtful, digging her boot-heel into the sand, her thumbs hooked into her belt, her forehead gathered into a heavy frown. There was a silence.

"One thing," she said, at last; "we can't give up the schooner. They would take our stores as well, and then where are we? Marooned, by Jove! How far do you suppose we are from the nearest town? Three hundred miles wouldn't be a bad guess, and they've got the loot—our ambergris—I'll swear to that. They didn't leave that aboard when the junk sank."

"Look here, Charlie," she said, turning to the Chinaman. "If the beach-combers take the schooner—the 'Bertha Millner'—from us, we'll be left to starve on this beach."

"I tink um yass."

"How are we going to get home? Are you going to let them do it? Are you going to let them have our schooner?"

"I tink no can have."

"Look here," she went on, with sudden energy. "There are only nine of them now, to our eight. We're about even. We can fight those swine. I know we can. If we jumped their camp and rushed them hard, believe me, we could run them into the sea. Mate," she cried, suddenly facing Wilbur, "are you game? Have you got blood in you? Those beach-comberes are going to attack us to-morrow, before high tide—that's flat. There's going to be a fight anyway. We can't let them have the schooner. It's starvation for us if we do.

"They mean to make a dash for the 'Bertha,' and we've got to fight them off. If there's any attacking to be done I propose to do it! I propose we jump their camp before it gets light—now—to-night—right away—run in on them there, take them by surprise, do for one or two of them if we have to, and get that ambergris. Then cut back to the schooner, up our sails, and wait for the tide to float us off. We can do it—I know we can. Mate, will you back me up?"

"Back you up? You bet I'll back you up, Moran. But—" Wilbur hesitated. "We could fight them so much more to advan-

tage from the deck of the schooner. Why not wait for them aboard? We could have our sails up, anyhow, and we could keep the beach-combers off till the tide rose high enough to drive them back. Why not do that?"

"I tink bes' wait topside boat," assented Charlie.

"Yes; why not, Moran?"

"Because," shouted the girl, "they've got our loot. I don't propose to be plundered of $150,000 if I can help it."

"Wassa dat?" demanded Charlie. "Hunder fiftee tlousand you hab got?"

"I did have it—we had it, the mate and I. We triced a sperm whale for the beach-combers, and when they thought they had everything out of him we found a lump of ambergris in him that will weigh close to two hundred pounds. Now look here, Charlie. The beach-combers have got the stuff. It's mine—I'm going to have it back. Here's the lay. Your men can fight—you can fight yourself. We'll make it a business proposition. Help me to get that ambergris, and if we get it I'll give each one of the men $1,000, and I'll give you $1,500. You can take that up and be independent rich the rest of your life. You can chuck it and rot on this beach, for it's fight or lose the schooner; you know that as well as I do. If you've got to fight anyhow, why not fight where it's going to pay the most?"

Charlie hesitated, pursing his lips.

"How about this, Moran?" Wilbur broke forth now, unheard by Charlie. "I've just been thinking; have we got a right to this ambergris, after all? The beach-combers found the whale. It was theirs. How have we the right to take the ambergris away from them any more than the sperm and the oil and the bone? It's theirs, if you come to that. I don't know as we've the right to it."

"Darn you!" shouted Moran in a blaze of fury, "right to it, right to it! If I haven't, who has? Who found it? Those dirty monkeys might have stood some show to a claim if they'd held to the one-third bargain, and offered to divvy with us when they got me where I couldn't help myself. I don't say I'd give in now if they had—give in to let 'em walk off with a hundred thousand dollars that I've got as good a claim to as they have! But they've saved me the trouble of arguing the question. They've taken it all, all! And there's no bargain in the game at all now. Now the stuff belongs to the strongest of us, and I'm glad of it. They thought they were the strongest and now they're going to find out. We're

dumped down here on this God-forsaken sand, and there's no law and no policemen. The strongest of us are going to live and the weakest are going to die. I'm going to live and I'm going to have my loot, too, and I'm not going to split fine hairs with these robbers at this time of day. I'm going to have it all, and that's the law you're under in this case, my righteous friend!"

She turned her back upon him, spinning around upon her heel, and Wilbur felt ashamed of himself and proud of her.

"I go talkee-talk to China boy," said Charlie, coming up.

For about five minutes the Chinamen conferred together, squatting in a circle on the beach. Moran paced up and down by the stranded dory. Wilbur leaned against the bleached whale-skull, his hands in his pockets. Once he looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock.

"All light," said Charlie, coming up from the group at last; "him fight plenty."

"Now," exclaimed Moran, "we've no time to waste. What arms have we got?"

"We've got the cutting-in spades," said Wilbur; "there's five of them. They're nearly ten feet long, and the blades are as sharp as razors; you couldn't want better pikes."

"That's an idea," returned Moran, evidently willing to forget her outburst of a moment before, perhaps already sorry for it. The party took stock of their weapons, and five huge cutting-in spades, a heavy knife from the galley, and a revolver of doubtful effectiveness were divided among them. The crew took the spades, Charlie the knife, and Wilbur the revolver. Moran had her own knife, a haftless dirk, such as is affected by all Norwegians, whether landsmen or sailors. They were examining this armament and Moran was suggesting a plan of attack, when Hoang, the leader of the beach-combers, and one other Chinaman appeared some little distance below them on the beach. The moon was low and there was no great light, but the two beach-combers caught the flash of the points of the spades. They halted and glanced narrowly and suspiciously at the group.

"Beasts!" muttered Moran. "They are up to the game—there's no surprising them now. Talk to him, Charlie; see what he wants."

Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie came part of the way toward Hoang and his fellow, and paused some fifteen feet distant, and a long colloquy ensued. It soon became evident, however, that in reality Hoang wanted nothing of them, though with great earnestness he

asserted his willingness to charter the "Bertha Millner" back to San Francisco.

"That's not his game at all," said Moran to Wilbur, in a low tone, her eyes never leaving those of the beach-comber. "He's pretty sure he could seize the 'Bertha' and never pay us a stiver. They've come down to spy on us, and they're doing it, too. There's no good trying to rush that camp now. They'll go back and tell the crew that we know their lay."

It was still very dark. Near the hulk of the beached "Bertha Millner" were grouped her crew, each armed with a long and lance-like cutting-in spade, watching and listening to the conference of the chiefs. The moon, almost down, had flushed blood-red, violently streaking the gray, smooth surface of the bay with her reflection. The tide was far out, rippling quietly along the reaches of wet sand. In the pauses of the conference the vast, muffling silence shut down with the abruptness of a valve suddenly closed.

How it happened, just who made the first move, in precisely what manner the action had been planned, or what led up to it, Wilbur could not afterward satisfactorily explain. There was a rush forward—he remembered that much—a dull thudding of feet over the resounding beach surface, a moment's writhing struggle with a half-naked brown figure that used knife and nail and tooth, and then the muffling silence again, broken only by the sound of their own panting. In that whirl of swift action Wilbur could reconstruct but two brief pictures: the Chinaman, Hoang's companion, flying like one possessed along the shore; Hoang himself flung headlong into the arms of the "Bertha's" coolies, and Moran, her eyes blazing, her thick braids flying, brandishing her fist as she shouted at the top of her deep voice, "We've got you, anyhow!"

They had taken Hoang prisoner, whether by treachery or not, Wilbur did not exactly know; and, even if unfair means had been used, he could not repress a feeling of delight and satisfaction as he told himself that in the very beginning of the fight that was to follow he and his mates had gained the first advantage.

As the action of that night's events became more and more accelerated, Wilbur could not but notice the change in Moran. It was very evident that the old Norse fighting blood of her was all astir; brutal, merciless, savage beyond all control. A sort of obsession seized upon her at the near approach of battle, a frenzy of action that was checked by nothing—that was insensible to all

restraint. At times it was impossible for him to make her hear him, or when she heard to understand what he was saying. Her vision contracted. It was evident that she could not see distinctly. Wilbur could no longer conceive of her as a woman of the days of civilization. She was lapsing back to the eighth century again—to the Vikings, the sea-wolves, the Berserkers.

"Now you're going to talk," she cried to Hoang, as the bound Chinaman sat upon the beach, leaning his back against the great skull. "Charlie, ask him if they saved the ambergris when the junk went down—if they've got it now?" Charlie put the question in Chinese, but the beach-comber only twinkled his vicious eyes upon them and held his peace. With the full sweep of her arm, her fist clinched till the knuckles whitened, Moran struck him in the face.

"Now will you talk?" she cried. Hoang wiped the blood from his face upon his shoulder and set his jaws. He did not answer.

"You will talk before I'm done with you, my friend; don't get any wrong notions in your head about that," Moran continued, her teeth clinched. "Charlie," she added, "is there a file aboard the schooner?"

"I tink um yass, boss hab got file."

"In the tool-chest, isn't it?" Charlie nodded, and Moran ordered it to be fetched.

"If we're to fight that crowd," she said, speaking to herself and in a rapid voice, thick from excitement and passion, "we've got to know where they've hid the loot, and what weapons they've got. If they have a rifle or a shotgun with them, it's going to make a big difference for us. The other fellow escaped and has gone back to warn the rest. It's fight now, and no mistake."

The Chinaman who had been sent aboard the schooner returned, carrying a long, rather coarse-grained file. Moran took it from him.

"Now," she said, standing in front of Hoang, "I'll give you one more chance. Answer me. Did you bring off the ambergris, you beast, when your junk sank? Where is it now? How many men have you? What arms have you got? Have your men got a rifle?—Charlie, put that all to him in your lingo, so as to make sure that he understands. Tell him if he don't talk I'm going to make him very sick."

Charlie put the questions in Chinese, pausing after each one. Hoang held his peace.

"I gave you fair warning," shouted Moran angrily, pointing at him with the file. "Will you answer?"

"Him no tell nuttin," observed Charlie.

"Fetch a cord here," commanded Moran. The cord was brought, and despite Hoang's struggles and writhings the file was thrust end-ways into his mouth and his jaws bound tightly together upon it by means of the cord passed over his head and under his chin. Some four inches of the file portruded from his lips. Moran took this end and drew it out between the beach-comber's teeth, then pushed it back slowly.

The hideous rasp of the operation turned Wilbur's blood cold within him. He looked away—out to sea, down the beach—anywhere, so that he might not see what was going forward. But the persistent grind and scrape still assaulted his ears. He turned about sharply.

"I—I—I'll go down the beach here a ways," he said quickly. "I can't stand—I'll keep watch to see if the beach-combers come up."

A few minutes later he heard Charlie hailing him.

"Chin-chin heap plenty now," said he, with a grin, as Wilbur came up.

Hoang sat on the sand in the midst of the circle. The file and coil of rope lay on the ground near by. The beach-comber was talking in a high-keyed sing-song, but with a lisp. He told them partly in pigeon English and partly in Cantonese, which Charlie translated, that their men were eight in number, and that they had intended to seize the schooner that night, but that probably his own capture had delayed their plans. They had no rifle. A shotgun had been on board, but had gone down with the sinking of the junk. The ambergris had been cut into two lumps, and would be found in a couple of old flour-sacks in the stern of the boat in which he and his men had come ashore. They were all armed with their little hatchets. He thought two of the men carried knives as well. There was neither pistol nor revolver among them.

"It seems to me," said Wilbur, "that we've got the long end."

"We catch um boss, too!" said Charlie, pointing to Hoang.

"And we are better armed," assented Moran. "We've got the cutting-in spades."

"And the revolver, if it will shoot any further than it will kick."

"They'll give us all the fight we want," declared Moran.

"Oh, him Kai-gingh, him fight all same devil."

"Give the men brandy, Charlie," commanded Moran. "We'll rush that camp right away."

The demijohn of spirits was brought down from the "Bertha" and passed around, Wilbur and Moran drinking from the tin cup, the coolies from the bottle. Hoang was fettered and locked in the "Bertha's" cabin.

"Now, then, are we ready?" cried Moran.

"I tink all light," answered Charlie.

The party set off down the beach. The moon had long since gone down, and the dawn was whitening over the eastern horizon. Landward, ragged blankets of morning mist lay close in the hollows here and there. It was profoundly still. The stars were still out. The surface of Magdalena Bay was smooth as a sheet of gray silk.

Twenty minutes passed, half an hour, an hour. The party tramped steadily forward, Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie leading, the coolies close behind carrying the cutting-in spades over their shoulders. Slowly and in silence they made the half circuit of the bay. The "Bertha Millner" was far behind them by now, a vague gray mass in the early morning light.

"Did you ever fight before?" Moran suddenly demanded of Charlie.

"One time I fight plenty much in San Flancisco in Washington stleet. Fight um See Yups."

Another half-hour passed. At times when they halted they began to hear the faint murmur of the creek, just beyond which was the broken and crumbling shanty, relic of an old Portuguese whaling-camp, where the beach-combers were camped. At Charlie's suggestion the party made a circuit, describing a half moon, to landward, so as to come out upon the enemy sheltered by the sand-dunes. Twenty minutes later they crossed the creek about four hundred yards from the shore. Here they spread out into a long line, and, keeping an interval of about fifteen feet between each of them, moved cautiously forward. The unevenness of the sand-breaks hid the shore from view, but Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie knew that by keeping the creek upon their left they would come out directly upon the house.

A few moments later Charlie held up his hand, and the men halted. The noise of the creek chattering into the tidewater of the bay was plainly audible just beyond; a ridge of sand, covered thinly with sage-brush, and a faint column of smoke rose into the air over the ridge itself. They were close in. The coolies were halted, and,

dropping upon their hands and knees, the three leaders crawled to the top of the break. Sheltered by a couple of sage-bushes and lying flat to the ground, Wilbur looked over and down upon the beach. The first object he made out was a crazy, roofless house, built of driftwood, the chinks plastered with 'dobe mud, the door fallen in.

Beyond, on the beach, was a flat-bottomed dingy, unpainted and foul with dirt. But all around the house the sand had been scooped and piled to form a low barricade, and behind this barricade Wilbur saw the beach-combers. There were eight of them. They were alert and ready, their hatchets in their hands. The gaze of each of them was fixed directly upon the sand-break which sheltered the "Bertha Millner's" officers and crew. They seemed to Wilbur to look him straight in the eye. They neither moved nor spoke. The silence and absolute lack of motion on the part of these small, half-naked Chinamen, with their ape-like muzzles and twinkling eyes, was ominous.

There could be no longer any doubts that the beach-combers had known of their enemies' movements and were perfectly aware of their presence behind the sand-break. Moran rose to her feet, and Wilbur and Charlie followed her example.

"There's no use hiding," she said; "they know we're here."

Charlie called up the crew. The two parties were ranged face to face. Over the eastern rim of the Pacific the blue whiteness of the early dawn was turning to a dull, roseate gold at the core of the sunrise. The headlands of Magdalena Bay stood black against the pale glow; overhead, the greater stars still shone. The monotonous, faint ripple of the creek was the only sound. It was about 3:30 o'clock.

X

A BATTLE

WILBUR had imagined that the fight would be hardly more than a wild rush down the slope of the beach, a dash over the beach-combers' breastworks of sand, and a brief hand-to-hand scrimmage around the old cabin. In all accounts he had ever read of such affairs, and in all ideas he had entertained on the subject, this had always been the case. The two bodies had shocked together like a college rush, there had been five minutes' play of knife and club and gun, a confused whirl of dust and smoke, and all was over before one had time either to think or be afraid. But nothing of the kind happened that morning.

The "Bertha Millner's" crew, in a long line, Moran at one end, Wilbur at the other, and Charlie in the centre, came on toward the beach-combers, step by step. There was little outcry. Each contestant singled out his enemy, and made slowly for him with eyes fixed and weapon ready, regardless of the movements of his mates.

"See any rifles among them, Charlie?" shouted Moran, suddenly breaking the silence.

"No, I tink no hab got," answered Charlie.

Wilbur took another step forward and cocked his revolver. One of the beach-combers shouted out something in angry vernacular, and Charlie instantly responded. All this time the line had been slowly advancing upon the enemy, and Wilbur began to wonder how long that heartbreaking suspense was to continue. This was not at all what he had imagined. Already he was within twenty feet of his man, could see the evil glint of his slant, small eye, and the shine of his yellow body, naked to the belt. Still foot by foot the forward movement continued. The Chinese on either side had begun exchanging insults; the still, hot air of the tropic dawn was vibrant with the Cantonese monosyllables tossed back and forth like tennis-balls over the low sand rampart. The thing was degenerating into a farce—the "Bertha's" Chinamen would not fight.

Back there, under the shelter of the schooner, it was all very well to talk, and they had been very brave when they had all flung themselves upon Hoang. Here, face to face with the enemy, the sun striking off heliograph flashes from their knives and spades, it was a vastly different matter. The thing, to Wilbur's mind, should have been done suddenly if it was to be done at all. The best course now was to return to camp and try some other plan. Charlie shouted a direction to him in pigeon English that he did not understand, but he answered all right, and moved forward another step so as to be in line with the coolie at his left.

The liquor that he had drunk before starting began suddenly to affect him, yet he knew that his head was yet clear. He could not bring himself to run away before them all, but he would have given much to have discovered a good reason for postponing the fight—if fight there was to be.

He remembered the cocked revolver in his hand, and, suddenly raising it, fired point-blank at his man, not fifteen feet away. The hammer snapped on the nipple, but the cartridge did not explode. Wilbur turned to the Chinaman next him in line, exclaiming excitedly:

"Here, say, have you got a knife—something I can fight with? This gun's no good."

There was a shout from Moran:

"Look out, here they come!"

Two of the beach-combers suddenly sprang over the sand breastworks and ran toward Charlie, their knives held low in front of them, ready to rip.

"Shoot! shoot! shoot!" shouted Moran rapidly.

Wilbur's revolver was a self-cocker. He raised it again, drawing hard on the trigger as he did so. It roared and leaped in his hand, and a whiff of burned powder came to his nostrils. Then Wilbur was astonished to hear himself shout at the top of his voice:

"Come on now, get into them—get into them now, everybody!"

The "Bertha's" Chinamen were all running forward, three of them well in advance of the others. In the rear Charlie was at grapples with a beach-comber who fought with a knife in each hand, and Wilbur had a sudden glimpse of another sitting on the sand with his hand to his mouth, the blood spurting between his fingers.

Wilbur suddenly realized that he held a knife, and that he was

directly abreast the sand rampart. How he got the knife he could not tell, though he afterward distinctly remembered throwing away his revolver, loaded as it was. He had leaped the breastworks, he knew that, and between him and the vast bright blur of the ocean he saw one of the beach-combers backing away and watching him intently, his hatchet in his hand. Wilbur had only time to think that he himself would no doubt be killed within the next few moments, when this latter halted abruptly, took a step forward, and, instead of striking downward, as Wilbur had anticipated, dropped upon his knee and struck with all his might at the calf of Wilbur's leg. It was only the thickness of his boots that saved Wilbur from being hamstrung where he stood. As it was, he felt the blade bite almost to the bone, and heard the blood squelch in the sole of his boot, as he staggered for the moment, almost tripping over the man in front of him.

The Chinaman sprang to his feet again, but Wilbur was at him in an instant, feeling instinctively that his chance was to close with his man, and so bring his own superior weight and strength to bear. Again and again he tried to run in and grip the slim yellow body, but the other dodged and backed away, as hard to hold as any fish. All around and back of him now Wilbur heard the hideous sound of stamping and struggling, and the noise of hoarse, quick shouts and the rebound of bodies falling and rolling upon the hard, smooth beach. The thing had not been a farce, after all. This was fighting at last, and there within arm's length were men grappling and gripping and hitting one another, each honestly striving to kill his fellow—Chinamen all, fighting in barbarous Oriental fashion with nails and teeth when the knife or hatchet failed. What did he, clubman and college man, in that hideous trouble that wrought itself out there on that heat-stricken tropic beach under that morning's sun?

Suddenly there was a flash of red flame, and a billow of thick, yellow smoke filled all the air. The cabin was afire. The hatchet-man with whom Wilbur was fighting had been backing in this direction. He was close in when the fire began to leap from the one window; now he could go no further. He turned to run sidewise between his enemy and the burning cabin. Wilbur thrust his foot sharply forward; the beach-comber tripped, staggered, and before he had reached the ground Wilbur had driven home the knife.

Then suddenly, at the sight of his smitten enemy rolling on the ground at his feet, the primitive man, the half-brute of the stone

age, leaped to life in Wilbur's breast—he felt his muscles thrilling with a strength they had not known before. His nerves, stretched tense as harp-strings, were vibrating to a new tune. His blood spun through his veins till his ears roared with the rush of it. Never had he conceived of such savage exultation as that which mastered him at that instant. The knowledge that he could kill filled him with a sense of power that was veritably royal. He felt physically larger. It was the joy of battle, the horrid exhilaration of killing, the animal of the race, the human brute suddenly aroused and dominating every instinct and tradition of centuries of civilization. The fight still was going forward.

Wilbur could hear the sounds of it, though from where he stood all sight was shut off by the smoke of the burning house. As he turned about, knife in hand, debating what next he should do, a figure burst down upon him, shadowy and distorted through the haze.

It was Moran, but Moran as Wilbur had never seen her before. Her eyes were blazing under her thick frown like fire under a bush. Her arms were bared to the elbow, her heavy ropes of hair flying and coiling from her in all directions, while with a voice hoarse from shouting she sang, or rather chanted, in her long-forgotten Norse tongue, fragments of old sagas, words, and sentences, meaningless even to herself. The fury of battle had exalted her to a sort of frenzy. She was beside herself with excitement. Once more she had lapsed back to the Vikings and sea-rovers of the tenth century—she was Brunhilde again, a shield-maiden, a Valkyrie, a Berserker and the daughter of Berserkers, and like them she fought in a veritable frenzy, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, every sense exalted, every force doubled, insensible to pain, deaf to all reason.

Her dirk uplifted, she rushed upon Wilbur, never once pausing in her chant. Wilbur shouted a warning to her as she came on, puzzled beyond words, startled back to a consciousness of himself again by this insensate attack.

"Moran! Moran!" he called. "What is it—you're wrong! It's I. It's Wilbur—your mate, can't you see?"

Moran could not see—blind to friend or foe, as she was deaf to reason, she struck at him with all the strength of her arm. But there was no skill in her fighting now. Wilbur dropped his own knife and gripped her right wrist. She closed with him upon the instant, clutching at his throat with her one free hand; and as he felt her strength—doubled and tripled in the fury of her madness—

Wilbur knew that, however easily he had overcome his enemy of a moment before, he was now fighting for his very life.

At first, Wilbur merely struggled to keep her from him—to prevent her using her dirk. He tried not to hurt her. But what with the spirits he had drunk before the attack, what with the excitement of the attack itself and the sudden unleashing of the brute in him an instant before, the whole affair grew dim and hazy in his mind. He ceased to see things in their proportion. His new-found strength gloried in matching itself with another strength that was its equal. He fought with Moran—not as he would fight with either woman or man, or with anything human, for the matter of that. He fought with her as against some impersonal force that it was incumbent upon him to conquer—that it was imperative he should conquer if he wished to live. When she struck, he struck blow for blow, force for force, his strength against hers, glorying in that strange contest, though he never once forgot that this last enemy was the girl he loved. It was not Moran whom he fought; it was her force, her determination, her will, her splendid independence, that he set himself to conquer.

Already she had dropped or flung away the dirk, and their battle had become an issue of sheer physical strength between them. It was a question now as to who should master the other. Twice she had fought Wilbur to his knees, the heel of her hand upon his face, his head thrust back between his shoulders, and twice he had wrenched away, rising to his feet again, panting, bleeding even, but with his teeth set and all his resolution at the sticking-point. Once he saw his chance, and planted his knuckles squarely between her eyes where her frown was knotted hard, hoping to stun her and end the fight once and for all. But the blow did not seem to affect her in the least. By this time he saw that her Berserker rage had worked itself clear as fermenting wine clears itself, and that she knew now with whom she was fighting; and he seemed now to understand the incomprehensible, and to sympathize with her joy in measuring her strength against his; and yet he knew that the combat was deadly serious, and that more than life was at stake. Moran despised a weakling.

For an instant, as they fell apart, she stood off, breathing hard and rolling up her sleeve; then, as she started forward again, Wilbur met her half-way, caught her round the neck and under the arm, gripping her left wrist with his right hand behind her; then, exerting every ounce of strength he yet retained, he thrust her down and

from him, until at length, using his hip as a pivot, he swung her off her feet, threw her fairly on her back, and held her so, one knee upon her chest, his hands closed vise-like on her wrists.

Then suddenly Moran gave up, relaxing in his grasp all in a second, and, to his great surprise, suddenly smiled.

"Ho! mate," she exclaimed; "that was a tough one; but I'm beaten—you're stronger than I thought for."

Wilbur released her and rose to his feet.

"Here," she continued, "give me your hand. I'm as weak as a kitten." As Wilbur helped her to her feet, she put her hand to her forehead, where his knuckles had left their mark, and frowned at him, but not ill-naturedly.

"Next time you do that," she said, "use a rock or a belaying-pin, or something that won't hurt—not your fist, mate." She looked at him admiringly. "What a two-fisted, brawny dray-horse it is! I told you I was stronger than most men, didn't I? But I'm the weaker of us two, and that's a fact. You've beaten, mate—I admit it; you've conquered me, and," she continued, smiling again and shaking him by the shoulder—"and, mate, do you know, I love you for it."

XI

A CHANGE IN LEADERS

"Well," exclaimed Wilbur at length, the excitement of the fight returning upon him. "We have plenty to do yet. Come on, Moran."

It was no longer Moran who took the initiative—who was the leader. The brief fight upon the shore had changed all that. It was Wilbur who was now the master, it was Wilbur who was aggressive. He had known what it meant to kill. He was no longer afraid of anything, no longer hesitating. He had felt a sudden quadrupling of all his strength, moral and physical.

All that was strong and virile and brutal in him seemed to harden and stiffen in the moment after he had seen the beach-comber collapse limply on the sand under the last strong knife-blow; and a sense of triumph, of boundless self-confidence, leaped within him, so that he shouted aloud in a very excess of exhilaration; and snatching up a heavy cutting-in spade, that had been dropped in the fight near the burning cabin, tossed it high into the air, catching it again as it descended, like any exultant savage.

"Come on!" he cried to Moran; "where are the beach-combers gone? I'm going to get one more before the show is over."

The two passed out of the zone of smoke, and reached the other side of the burning cabin just in time to see the last of the struggle. The whole affair had not taken more than a quarter of an hour. In the end the beach-combers had been beaten. Four had fled into the waste of sand and sage that lay back of the shore, and had not been pursued. A fifth had been almost hamstrung by one of the "Bertha's" coolies, and had given himself up. A sixth, squealing and shrieking like a tiger-cat, had been made prisoner; and Wilbur himself had accounted for the seventh.

As Wilbur and Moran came around the cabin they saw the "Bertha Millner's" Chinamen in a group, not far from the water's edge, reassembled after the fight—panting and bloody, some of them bare to the belt, their weapons still in their hands. Here and there

was a bandaged arm or head; but their number was complete—or no, was it complete?

"Ought to be one more," said Wilbur, anxiously hastening forward.

As the two came up the coolies parted, and Wilbur saw one of them, his head propped upon a rolled-up blouse, lying ominously still on the trampled sand.

"It's Charlie!" exclaimed Moran.

"Where's he hurt?" cried Wilbur to the group of coolies. "Jim! —where's Jim? Where's he hurt, Jim?"

Jim, the only member of the crew besides Charlie who could understand or speak English, answered:

"Kai-gingh him fin' pistol, you' pistol; Charlie him fight plenty; bime-by, when he no see, one-piecee Kai-gingh he come up behin', shoot um Charlie in side—savvy?"

"Did he kill him? Is he dead?"

"No, I tinkum die plenty soon; him no savvy nuttin' now, him all-same sleep. Plenty soon bime-by him sleep for good, I tink."

There was little blood to be seen when Wilbur gently unwrapped the torn sleeve of a blouse that had been used as a bandage. Just under the armpit was the mark of the bullet—a small puncture already closed, half hidden under a clot or two of blood. The coolie lay quite unconscious, his eyes wide open, drawing a faint, quick breath at irregular intervals.

"What do you think, mate?" asked Moran in a low voice.

"I think he's got it through the lungs," answered Wilbur, frowning in distress and perplexity. "Poor old Charlie!"

Moran went down on a knee, and put a finger on the slim, corded wrist, yellow as old ivory.

"Charlie," she called—"Charlie, here, don't you know me? Wake up, old chap! It's Moran. You're not hurt so very bad, are you?"

Charlie's eyes closed and opened a couple of times.

"No can tell," he answered feebly; "hurt plenty big"; then he began to cough.

Wilbur drew a sigh of relief. "He's all right!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I think he's all right," assented Moran.

"First thing to do now is to get him aboard the schooner," said Wilbur. "We'll take him right across in the beach-combers' dory here. By Jove!" he exclaimed on a sudden. "The ambergris—I'd forgotten all about it." His heart sank. In the hideous confusion

of that morning's work, all thought of the loot had been forgotten. Had the battle been for nothing, after all? The moment the beach-combers had been made aware of the meditated attack, it would have been an easy matter for them to have hidden the ambergris—destroyed it even.

In two strides Wilbur had reached the beach-combers' dory and was groping in the forward cuddy. Then he uttered a great shout of satisfaction. The "stuff" was there, all of it, though the mass had been cut into quarters, three parts of it stowed in tea-flails, the fourth still reeved up in the hammock netting.

"We've got it!" he cried to Moran, who had followed him. "We've got it, Moran! Over $100,000. We're rich—rich as boodlers, you and I. Oh, it was worth fighting for, after all, wasn't it? Now we'll get out of here—now we'll cut for home."

"It's only Charlie I'm thinking about," answered Moran, hesitating. "If it wasn't for that we'd be all right. I don't know whether we did right, after all, in jumping the camp here. I wouldn't like to feel that I'd got Charlie into our quarrel only to have him killed."

Wilbur stared at this new Moran in no little amazement. Where was the reckless, untamed girl of the previous night, who had sworn at him and denounced his niggling misgivings as to right and wrong?

"Hoh!" he retorted impatiently, "Charlie's right enough. And, besides, I didn't force him to anything. I—we, that is—took the same chances. If I hadn't done for my man there behind the cabin, he would have done for me. At all events, we carried our point. We got the loot. They took it from us, and we were strong enough to get it back."

Moran merely nodded, as though satisfied with his decision, and added:

"Well, what next, mate?"

"We'll get back to the 'Bertha' now and put to sea as soon as we can catch the tide. I'll send Jim and two of the other men across in the dory with Charlie. The rest of us will go around by the shore. We've got to have a chin-chin with Hoang, if he don't get loose aboard there and fire the boat before we can get back. I don't propose taking these beach-combers back to 'Frisco with us."

"What will we do with the two prisoners?" she asked.

"Let them go; we've got their arms."

The positions of the two were reversed. It was Wilbur who

assumed control and direction of what went forward, Moran taking his advice and relying upon his judgment.

In accordance with Wilbur's orders, Charlie was carried aboard the dory; which, with two Chinamen at the oars, and the ambergris stowed again into the cuddy, at once set off for the schooner. Wilbur himself cut the ropes on the two prisoners, and bade them shift for themselves. The rest of the party returned to the "Bertha Millner" around the wide sweep of the beach.

It was only by high noon, under the flogging of a merciless sun, that the entire crew of the little schooner once more reassembled under the shadow of her stranded hulk. They were quite worn out; and as soon as Charlie was lifted aboard, and the ambergris—or, as they spoke of it now, the "loot"—was safely stowed in the cabin, Wilbur allowed the Chinamen three or four hours' rest. They had had neither breakfast nor dinner; but their exhaustion was greater than their hunger, and in a few moments the entire half-dozen were stretched out asleep on the forward deck in the shadow of the foresail raised for the purpose of sheltering them. However, Wilbur and Moran sought out Hoang, whom they found as they had left him—bound upon the floor of the cabin.

"Now we have a talk—savvy?" Wilbur told him as he loosed the ropes about his wrists and ankles. "We got our loot back from you, old man, and we got one of your men into the bargain. You woke up the wrong crowd, Hoang, when you went up against this outfit. You're in a bad way, my friend. Your junk is wrecked; all your oil and blubber from the whale is lost; four of your men have run away, one is killed, another one we caught and let go, another one has been hamstrung; and you yourself are our prisoner, with your teeth filed down to your gums. Now," continued Wilbur, with the profoundest gravity, "I hope this will be a lesson to you. Don't try and get too much the next time. Just be content with what is yours by right, or what you are strong enough to keep, and don't try to fight with white people. Other coolies, I don't say. But when you try to get the better of white people you are out of your class."

The little beach-comber (he was scarcely above five feet) rubbed his chafed wrists, and fixed Wilbur with his tiny, twinkling eyes.

"What you do now?"

"We go home. I'm going to maroon you and your people here on this beach. You deserve that I should let you eat your fists by way of table-board; but I'm no such dirt as you. When our men

left the schooner they brought off with them a good share of our provisions. I'll leave them here for you—and there's plenty of turtle and abalone to be had for the catching. Some of the American men-of-war, I believe, come down to this bay for target-practice twice a year, and if we speak any on the way up we'll ask them to call here for castaways. That's what I'll do for you, and that's all! If you don't like it, you can set out to march up the coast till you hit a town; but I wouldn't advise you to try it. Now what have you got to say?"

Hoang was silent. His queue had become unbound for half its length, and he plaited it anew, winking his eyes thoughtfully.

"Well, what do you say?" said Moran.

"I lose face," answered Hoang at length, calmly.

"You lose face? What do you mean?"

"I lose face," he insisted; then added: "I heap 'shamed. You fightee my China boy, you catchee me. My boy no mo' hab me fo' boss—savvy? I go back, him no likee me. Mebbe all same killee me. I lose face—no mo' boss."

"What a herd of wild cattle!" muttered Wilbur.

"There's something in what he says, don't you think, mate?" observed Moran, bringing a braid over each shoulder and stroking it according to her habit.

"We'll ask Jim about it," decided Wilbur.

But Jim at once confirmed Hoang's statement. "Oh, Kai-gingh killum no-good boss, fo' sure," he declared.

"Don't you think, mate," said Moran, "we'd better take him up to 'Frisco with us? We've had enough fighting and killing."

So it was arranged that the defeated beach-comber, the whipped buccaneer, who had "lost face" and no longer dared look his men in the eye, should be taken aboard.

By four o'clock next morning Wilbur had the hands at work digging the sand from around the "Bertha Millner's" bow. The line by which she was to be warped off was run out to the ledge of the rock; fresh water was taken on; provisions for the marooned beach-combers were cached upon the beach; the dory was taken aboard, gaskets were cast off, and hatches battened down.

At high tide, all hands straining upon the warp, the schooner was floated off, and under touch of the lightest airs drew almost imperceptibly away from the land. They were quite an hour crawling out to the heads of the bay. But here the breeze was freshening. Moran took the wheel; the flying-jib and staysail were set;

the wake began to whiten under the schooner's stern, the forefoot sang; the Pacific opened out more and more; and by 12:30 o'clock Moran put the wheel over, and, as the schooner's bow swung to the northward, cried to Wilbur:

"Mate, look your last of Magdalena Bay!"

Standing at her side, Wilbur turned and swept the curve of the coast with a single glance. The vast, heat-scourged hoop of yellow sand, the still, smooth shield of indigo water, with its beds of kelp, had become insensibly dear to him. It was all familiar, friendly, and hospitable. Hardly an acre of that sweep of beach that did not hold the impress of his foot. There was the point near by the creek where he and Moran first landed to fill the water-casks and to gather abalones; the creek itself, where he had snared quail; the sand spit with its whitened whale's skull, where he and Moran had beached the schooner; and there, last of all, that spot of black over which still hung a haze of brown-gray smoke, the charred ruins of the old Portuguese whaling-cabin, where they had outfought the beach-combers.

For a moment Wilbur and Moran looked back without speaking. They stood on the quarter-deck; in the sahdow of the mainsail, shut off from the sight of the schooner's crew, and for the instant quite alone.

"Well, Moran, it's good-by to the old places, isn't it?" said Wilbur at length.

"Yes," she said, her deep voice pitched even deeper than usual. "Mate, great things have happened there."

"It doesn't look like a place for a Tong row with Chinese pirates, though, does it?" he said; but even as he spoke the words, he guessed that that was not what he meant.

"Oh, what did that amount to?" she said, with an impatient movement of her head. "It was there that I first knew myself; and knew that, after all, you were a man and I was a woman; and that there was just us—you and I—in the world; and that you loved me and I loved you, and that nothing else was worth thinking of."

Wilbur shut his hand down over hers as it gripped a spoke of the wheel.

"Moran, I knew that long since," he said. "Such a month as this has been! Why, I feel as though I had only begun to live since I began to love you."

"And you do, mate?" she answered—"you do love me, and

always will? Oh, you don't know," she went on, interrupting his answer, "you haven't a guess, how the last two days have changed me. Something has happened here"—and she put both her hands over her breast. "I'm all different here, mate. It's all you inside here—all you! And it hurts, and I'm proud that it does hurt. Oh!" she cried, of a sudden, "I don't know how to love yet, and I do it very badly, and I can't tell you how I feel, because I can't even tell it to myself. But you must be good to me now." The deep voice trembled a little. "Good to me, mate, and true to me, mate, because I've only you, and all of me is yours. Mate, be good to me, and always be kind to me. I'm not Moran any more. I'm not proud and strong and independent, and I don't want to be lonely. I want you—I want you always with me. I'm just a woman now, dear—just a woman that loves you with a heart she's just found."

Wilbur could find no words to answer. There was something so pathetic and at the same time so noble in Moran's complete surrender of herself, and her dependence upon him, her unquestioned trust in him and his goodness, that he was suddenly smitten with awe at the sacredness of the obligation thus imposed on him. She was his now, to have and to hold, to keep, to protect, and to defend—she who was once so glorious of her strength, of her savage isolation, her inviolate, pristine maidenhood. All words seemed futile and inadequate to him.

She came close to him, and put her hands upon his shoulders, and, looking him squarely in the eye, said:

"You do love me, mate, and you always will?"

"Always, Moran," said Wilbur, simply. He took her in his arms, and she laid her cheek against his for a moment, then took his head between her hands and kissed him.

Two days passed. The "Bertha Millner" held steadily to her northward course, Moran keeping her well in toward the land. Wilbur maintained a lookout from the crow's-nest in the hope of sighting some white cruiser or battleship on her way south for target-practice. In the cache of provisions he had left for the beach-combers he had inserted a message, written by Hoang, to the effect that they might expect to be taken off by a United States man-of-war within the month.

Hoang did not readily recover his "loss of face." The "Bertha's" Chinamen would have nothing to do with this member of a hostile Tong; and the humiliated beach-comber kept almost entirely

to himself, sitting on the forecastle-head all day long, smoking his sui-yen-hu and brooding silently to himself.

Moran had taken the lump of ambergris from out Kitchell's old hammock, and had slung the hammock itself in the schooner's waist, and Charlie was made as comfortable as possible therein. They could do but little for him, however; and he was taken from time to time with spells of coughing that racked him with a dreadful agony. At length one noon, just after Moran had taken the sun and had calculated that the "Bertha" was some eight miles to the southwest of San Diego, she was surprised to hear Wilbur calling her sharply. She ran to him, and found him standing in the waist by Charlie's hammock.

The Chinaman was dying, and knew it. He was talking in a faint and feeble voice to Wilbur as she came up, and was trying to explain to him that he was sorry he had deserted the schooner during the scare in the bay.

"Planty muchee solly," he said; "China boy, him heap flaid of Feng-shui. When Feng-shui no likee, we then must go chop-chop. Plenty much solly I leave-um schooner that night; solly plenty—savvy?"

"Of course we savvy, Charlie," said Moran. "You weren't afraid when it came to fighting."

"I die pletty soon," said Charlie calmly. "You say you gib me fifteen hundled dollah?"

"Yes, yes; that was our promise. What do you want done with it, Charlie?"

"I want plenty fine funeral in Chinatown in San Francisco. Oh, heap fine! You buy um first-chop coffin—savvy? Silver heap much—costum big money. You gib my money to Hop Sing Association, topside Ming Yen temple. You savvy Hop Sing?—one Six Companies."

"Yes, yes."

"Tellum Hop Sing I want funeral—four-piecee horse. You no flogettee horse?" he added apprehensively.

"No, I'll not forget the horses, Charlie. You shall have four."

"Want six-piecee band musicians—China music—heap plenty gong. You no flogettee? Two piecee priest, all dressum white—savvy? You mus' buyum coffin yo'self. Velly fine coffin, heap much silver, an' four-piecee horse. You catchum fireclacker—one, five, seven hundled fireclacker, makeum big noise; an' loast pig, an'

plenty lice an' China blandy. Heap fine funeral, costum fifteen hundled dollah. I be bury all same Mandarin—all same Little Pete. You plomise, sure?"

"I promise you, Charlie. You shall have a funeral finer than little Pete's."

Charlie nodded his head contentedly, drawing a breath of satisfaction.

"Bimeby Hop Sing sendum body back China." He closed his eyes and lay for a long time, worn out with the effort of speaking, as if asleep. Suddenly he opened his eyes wide. "You no flogettee horse?"

"Four horses, Charlie. I'll remember."

He drooped once more, only to rouse again at the end of a few minutes with:

"First-chop coffin, plenty much silver"; and again, a little later and very feebly: "Six-piecee—band music—China music—four-piecee—gong—four."

"I promise you, Charlie," said Wilbur.

"Now," answered Charlie—"now I die."

And the low-caste Cantonese coolie, with all the dignity and calmness of a Cicero, composed himself for death.

An hour later Wilbur and Moran knew that he was dead. Yet, though they had never left the hammock, they could not have told at just what moment he died.

Later, on that same afternoon, Wilbur, from the crow's-nest, saw the lighthouse on Point Loma and the huge rambling bulk of the Coronado Hotel spreading out and along the beach.

It was the outpost of civilization. They were getting back to the world again. Within an hour's ride of the hotel were San Diego, railroads, newspapers, and policemen. Just off the hotel, however, Wilbur could discern the gleaming white hull of a United States man-of-war. With the glass he could make her out to be one of the monitors—the "Monterey" in all probability.

After advising with Moran, it was decided to put in to land. The report as to the castaways could be made to the "Monterey," and Charlie's body forwarded to his Tong in San Francisco.

In two hours' time the schooner was well up, and Wilbur stood by Moran's side at the wheel, watching and studying the familiar aspect of Coronado Beach.

"It's a great winter resort," he told her. "I was down here with a party two years ago. Nothing has changed. You see that big

sort of round wing, Moran, all full of windows? That's the dining-room. And there's the bathhouse and the bowling-alley. See the people on the beach, and the girls in white duck skirts; and look up there by the veranda—let me take the glass—yes, there's a tally-ho coach. Isn't it queer to get back to this sort of thing after Magdalena Bay and the beach-combers?"

Moran spun the wheel without reply, and gave an order to Jim to ease off the foresheet.

XII

NEW CONDITIONS

THE winter season at the Hotel del Coronado had been unusually gay that year, and the young lady who wrote the society news in diary form for one of the San Francisco weekly papers had held forth at much length upon the hotel's "unbroken succession of festivities." She had also noted that "prominent among the newest arrivals" had been Mr. Nat Ridgeway, of San Francisco, who had brought down from the city, aboard his elegant and sumptuously fitted yacht "Petrel," a jolly party, composed largely of the season's débutantes. To be mentioned in the latter category was Miss Josie Herrick, whose lavender coming-out tea at the beginning of the season was still a subject of comment among the gossips—and all the rest of it.

The "Petrel" had been in the harbor but a few days, and on this evening a dance was given at the hotel in honor of her arrival. It was to be a cotillon, and Nat Ridgeway was going to lead with Josie Herrick. There had been a coaching party to Tia Juana that day, and Miss Herrick had returned to the hotel only in time to dress. By 9:30 she emerged from the process—which had involved her mother, her younger sister, her maid, and one of the hotel chambermaids—a dainty, firm-corseted little body, all tulle, white satin, and high-piled hair. She carried Maréchal Niel roses, ordered by wire from Monterey; and about an hour later, when Ridgeway gave the nod to the waiting musicians, and swung her off to the beat of a two-step, there was not a more graceful little figure upon the floor of the incomparable round ballroom of the Coronado Hotel.

The cotillon was a great success. The ensigns and younger officers of the monitor—at that time anchored off the hotel—attended in uniform; and enough of the members of what was known in San Francisco as the "dancing set" were present to give the affair the necessary *entrain*. Even Jerry Haight, who belonged more distinctly to the "country-club set," and who had spent the early part of that winter shooting elk in Oregon, was among the

ranks of the "rovers," who grouped themselves about the draughty doorways, and endeavored to appear unconscious each time Ridgeway gave the signal for a "break."

The figures had gone round the hall once. The "first set" was out again, and as Ridgeway guided Miss Herrick by the "rovers" she looked over the array of shirt-fronts, searching for Jerry Haight.

"Do you see Mr. Haight?" she asked of Ridgeway. "I wanted to favor him this break. I owe him two already, and he'll never forgive me if I overlook him now."

Jerry Haight had gone to the hotel office for a few moments' rest and a cigarette, and was nowhere in sight. But when the set broke, and Miss Herrick, despairing of Jerry, had started out to favor one of the younger ensigns, she suddenly jostled against him, pushing his way eagerly across the floor in the direction of the musicians' platform.

"Oh!" she cried, "Mr. Haight, you've missed your chance—I've been looking for you."

But Jerry did not hear—he seemed very excited. He crossed the floor, almost running, and went up on the platform where the musicians were meandering softly through the mazes of "La Paloma," and brought them to an abrupt silence.

"Here, I say, Haight!" exclaimed Ridgeway, who was near by, "you can't break up my figure like that."

"Gi' me a call there on the bugle," said Haight rapidly to the cornetist. "Anything to make 'em keep quiet a moment."

The cornetist sounded a couple of notes, and the cotillon paused in the very act of the break. The shuffling of feet grew still, and the conversation ceased. A diamond brooch had been found, no doubt, or some supper announcement was to be made. But Jerry Haight, with a great sweep of his arm, the forgotten cigarette between his fingers, shouted out breathlessly:

"Ross Wilbur is out in the office of the hotel!"

There was an instant's silence, and then a great shout. Wilbur found! Ross Wilbur come back from the dead! Ross Wilbur, hunted for and bootlessly traced from Buenos Ayres in the south to the Aleutian Islands in the north. Ross Wilbur, the puzzle of every detective bureau on the coast; the subject of a thousand theories; whose name had figured in the scareheads of every newspaper west of the Mississippi. Ross Wilbur, seen at a fashionable tea and his club of an afternoon, then suddenly blotted out from the world

of men; swallowed up and engulfed by the unknown, with not so much as a button left behind. Ross Wilbur the suicide; Ross Wilbur, the murdered; Ross Wilbur, victim of a band of kidnappers, the hero of some dreadful story that was never to be told, the mystery, the legend—behold he was there! Back from the unknown, dropped from the clouds, spewed up again from the bowels of the earth—a veritable god from the machine who in a single instant was to disentangle all the unexplained complications of those past winter months.

"Here he comes!" shouted Jerry, his eyes caught by a group of men in full dress and gold lace who came tramping down the hall to the ballroom, bearing a nondescript figure on their shoulders. "Here he comes—the boys are bringing him in here! Oh!" he cried, turning to the musicians, "can't you play something?—anything! Hit it up for all you're worth! Ridgeway—Nat, look here! Ross was Yale, y' know—Yale '95; ain't we enough Yale men here to give him the yell?"

Out of all time and tune, but with a vigor that made up for both, the musicians banged into a patriotic air. Jerry, standing on a chair that itself was standing on the platform, led half a dozen frantic men in the long thunder of the "Brek-kek-kek-kek, co-ex, co-ex."

Around the edges of the hall excited girls, and chaperons themselves no less agitated, were standing up on chairs and benches, splitting their gloves and breaking their fans in their enthusiasm; while every male dancer on the floor—ensigns in their gold-faced uniforms and "rovers" in starched and immaculate shirt-bosoms—cheered and cheered and struggled with one another to shake hands with a man whom two of their number—old Yale grads, with memories of athletic triumphs yet in their minds—carried into that ballroom, borne high upon their shoulders.

And the hero of the occasion, the centre of all this enthusiasm—thus carried as if in triumph into this assembly in evening dress, in white tulle and whiter kid, odorous of delicate sachets and scarce-perceptible perfumes—was a figure unhandsome and unkempt beyond description. His hair was long, and hanging over his eyes. A thick, uncared-for beard concealed the mouth and chin. He was dressed in a Chinaman's blouse and jeans—the latter thrust into slashed and tattered boots. The tan and weatherbeatings of nearly half a year of the tropics were spread over his face; a partly healed scar disfigured one temple and cheek-bone; the hands, to the very

finger-nails, were gray with grime; the jeans and blouse and boots were fouled with grease, with oil, with pitch, and all manner of the dirt of an uncared-for ship. And as the dancers of the cotillon pressed about, and a hundred kid-gloved hands stretched toward his own palms, there fell from Wilbur's belt upon the waxed floor of the ballroom the knife he had so grimly used in the fight upon the beach, the ugly stains still blackening on the haft.

There was no more cotillon that night. They put him down at last; and in half a dozen sentences Wilbur told them of how he had been shanghaied—told them of Magdalena Bay, his fortune in the ambergris, and the fight with the beach-combers.

"You people are going down there for target-practice, aren't you?" he said, turning to one of the "Monterey's" officers in the crowd about him. "Yes? Well, you'll find the coolies there, on the beach, waiting for you. All but one," he added, grimly.

"We marooned six of them, but the seventh didn't need to be marooned. They tried to plunder us of our boat, but, by ——, we made it interesting for 'em!"

"I say, steady, old man!" exclaimed Nat Ridgeway, glancing nervously toward the girls in the surrounding group. "This isn't Magdalena Bay, you know."

And for the first time Wilbur felt a genuine pang of disappointment and regret as he realized that it was not.

Half an hour later, Ridgeway drew him aside. "I say, Ross, let's get out of here. You can't stand here talking all night. Jerry and you and I will go up to my rooms, and we can talk there in peace. I'll order up three quarts of fizz, and—"

"Oh, rot your fizz!" declared Wilbur. "If you love me, give me Christian tobacco."

As they were going out of the ballroom, Wilbur caught sight of Josie Herrick, and, breaking away from the others, ran over to her.

"Oh!" she cried, breathless. "To think and to think of your coming back after all! No, I don't realize it—I can't. It will take me until morning to find out that you've really come back. I just know now that I'm happier than I ever was in my life before. Oh!" she cried, "do I need to tell you how glad I am? It's just too splendid for words. Do you know, I was thought to be the last person you had ever spoken to while alive, and the reporters and all—oh, but we must have such a talk when all is quiet again! And our dance—we've never had our dance. I've got your card

yet. Remember the one you wrote for me at the tea—a facsimile of it was published in all the papers. You are going to be a hero when you get back to San Francisco. Oh, Ross! Ross!" she cried, the tears starting to her eyes, "you've really come back, and you are just as glad as I am, aren't you—glad that you've come back—come back to me?"

Later on, in Ridgeway's room, Wilbur told his story again more in detail to Ridgeway and Jerry. All but one portion of it. He could not make up his mind to speak to them—these society fellows, clubmen and city bred—of Moran. How he was going to order his life henceforward—his life, that he felt to be void of interest without her—he did not know. That was a question for later consideration.

"We'll give another cotillon!" exclaimed Ridgeway, "up in the city—give it for you, Ross, and you'll lead. It'll be the event of the season!"

Wilbur uttered an exclamation of contempt. "I've done with that sort of foolery," he answered.

"Nonsense; why, think, we'll have it in your honor. Every smart girl in town will come, and you'll be the lion of—"

"You don't seem to understand!" cried Wilbur impatiently. "Do you think there's any fun in that for me now? Why, man, I've fought—fought with a naked dirk, fought with a coolie who snapped at me like an ape—and you talk to me of dancing and functions and german favors! It wouldn't do some of you people a bit of harm if you were shanghaied yourselves. That sort of life, if it don't do anything else, knocks a big bit of seriousness into you. You fellows make me sick," he went on vehemently. "As though there wasn't anything else to do but lead cotillons and get up new figures!"

"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Nat Ridgeway. "Where are you going now—back to Magdalena Bay?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

Wilbur smote the table with his fist.

"Cuba!" he cried. "I've got a crack little schooner out in the bay here, and I've got a hundred thousand dollars' worth of loot aboard of her. I've tried beach-combing for a while, and now I'll try filibustering. It may be a crazy idea, but it's better than dancing. I'd rather lead an expedition than a german, and you can chew on that, Nathaniel Ridgeway."

Jerry looked at him as he stood there before them in the filthy, reeking blouse and jeans, the ragged boots, and the mane of hair and tangled beard, and remembered the Wilbur he used to know —the Wilbur of the carefully creased trousers, the satin scarfs and fancy waistcoats.

"You're a different sort than when you went away, Ross," said Jerry.

"Right you are," answered Wilbur.

"But I will venture a prophecy," continued Jerry, looking keenly at him.

"Ross, you are a born-and-bred city man. It's in the blood of you and the bones of you. I'll give you three years for this new notion of yours to wear itself out You think just now you're going to spend the rest of your life as an amateur buccaneer. In three years, at the outside, you'll be using your 'loot,' as you call it, or the interest of it, to pay your taxes and your tailor, your pew rent and your club dues, and you'll be what the biographers call 'a respectable member of the community.'"

"Did you ever kill a man, Jerry?" asked Wilbur. "No? Well, you kill one some day—kill him in a fair give-and-take fight—and see how it makes you feel, and what influence it has on you, and then come back and talk to me."

It was long after midnight. Wilbur rose.

"We'll ring for a boy," said Ridgeway, "and get you a room. I can fix you out with clothes enough in the morning."

Wilbur stared in some surprise, and then said:

"Why, I've got the schooner to look after. I can't leave those coolies alone all night."

"You don't mean to say you're going on board at this time in the morning?"

"Of course!"

"Why—but—but you'll catch your death of cold."

Wilbur stared at Ridgeway, then nodded helplessly, and, scratching his head, said, half aloud:

"No, what's the use; I can't make 'em understand. Good-night. I'll see you in the morning."

"We'll all come out and visit you on your yacht," Ridgeway called after him; but Wilbur did not hear.

In answer to Wilbur's whistle, Jim came in with the dory and took him off to the schooner. Moran met him as he came over the side.

"I took the watch myself to-night and let the boy turn in," she said. "How is it ashore, mate?"

"We've come back to the world of little things, Moran," said Wilbur. "But we'll pull out of here in the morning and get back to the places where things are real."

"And that's a good hearing, mate."

"Let's get up here on the quarterdeck," added Wilbur. "I've something to propose to you."

Moran laid an arm across his shoulder, and the two walked aft For half an hour Wilbur talked to her earnestly about his new idea of filibustering; and as he told her of the war he warmed to the subject, his face glowing, his eyes sparkling. Suddenly, however, he broke off

"But no!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand, Moran. How can you—you're foreign-born. It's no affair of yours!"

"Mate! mate!" cried Moran, her hands upon his shoulders. "It's you who don't understand—don't understand me. Don't you know—can't you see? Your people are mine now. I'm happy only in your happiness. You were right—the best happiness is the happiness one shares. And your sorrows belong to me, just as I belong to you, dear. Your enemies are mine, and your quarrels are my quarrels." She drew his head quickly toward her and kissed him.

In the morning the two had made up their minds to a certain vague course of action. To get away—anywhere—was their one aim. Moran was by nature a creature unfit for civilization, and the love of adventure and the desire for action had suddenly leaped to life in Wilbur's blood and was not to be resisted. They would get up to San Francisco, dispose of their "loot," outfit the "Bertha Millner" as a filibuster, and put to sea again. They had discussed the advisability of rounding the Horn in so small a ship as the "Bertha Millner," but Moran had settled that at once.

"I've got to know her pretty well," she told Wilbur. "She's sound as a nut. Only let's get away from this place."

But toward ten o'clock on the morning after their arrival off Coronado, and just as they were preparing to get under way, Hoang touched Wilbur's elbow.

"Seeum lil one-piece smoke-boat; him come chop-chop."

In fact, a little steam-launch was rapidly approaching the schooner. In another instant she was alongside. Jerry, Nat Ridge-

way, Josie Herrick, and an elderly woman, whom Wilbur barely knew as Miss Herrick's married sister, were aboard.

"We've come off to see your yacht!" cried Miss Herrick to Wilbur as the launch bumped along the schooner's counter. "Can we come aboard?" She looked very pretty in her crisp pink shirt-waist. her white duck skirt, and white kid shoes, her sailor hat tilted at a barely perceptible angle. The men were in white flannels and smart yachting suits. "Can we come aboard?" she repeated.

Wilbur gasped and stared. "Good Lord!" he muttered. "Oh, come along," he added, desperately.

The party came over the side.

"Oh, my!" said Miss Herrick blankly, stopping short.

The decks, masts, and rails of the schooner were shiny with a black coating of dirt and grease; the sails were gray with grime; a strangling odor of oil and tar, of cooking and of opium, of Chinese punk and drying fish, pervaded all the air. In the waist, Hoang and Jim, bare to the belt, their queues looped around their necks to be out of the way, were stowing the dory and exchanging high-pitched monosyllables. Miss Herrick's sister had not come aboard. The three visitors—Jerry, Ridgeway, and Josie—stood nervously huddled together, their elbows close in, as if to avoid contact with the prevailing filth, their immaculate white outing-clothes detaching themselves violently against the squalor and sordid grime of the schooner's background.

"Oh, my!" repeated Miss Herrick in dismay, half closing her eyes. "To think of what you must have been through! I thought you had some kind of a yacht. I had no idea it would be like this." And as she spoke, Moran came suddenly upon the group from behind the foresail, and paused in abrupt surprise, her thumbs in her belt.

She still wore men's clothes and was booted to the knee. The heavy blue woolen shirt was open at the throat, the sleeves rolled half-way up her large white arms. In her belt she carried her haftless Scandinavian dirk. She was hatless as ever, and her heavy, fragrant cables of rye-hued hair fell over her shoulders and breast to far below her belt.

Miss Herrick started sharply, and Moran turned an inquiring glance upon Wilbur. Wilbur took his resolution in both hands.

"Miss Herrick," he said, "this is Moran—Moran Sternersen."

Moran took a step forward holding out her hand. Josie, all

bewildered, put her tight-gloved fingers into the calloused palm, looking up nervously into Moran's face.

"I'm sure," she said feebly, almost breathlessly, "I—I'm sure I'm very pleased to meet Miss Sternersen."

It was long before the picture left Wilbur's imagination. Josie Herrick, petite, gowned in white, crisp from her maid's grooming; and Moran, sea-rover and daughter of a hundred Vikings, towering above her, booted and belted, gravely clasping Josie's hand in her own huge fist.

XIII

MORAN STERNERSEN

San Francisco once more! For two days the "Bertha Millner" had been beating up the coast, fighting her way against northerly winds, butting into head seas.

The warmth, the stillness, the placid, drowsing quiet of Magdalena Bay, steaming under the golden eye of a tropic heaven, the white, baked beach, the bay-heads, striated with the mirage in the morning, the coruscating sunset, the enchanted mystery of the purple night, with its sheen of stars and riding moon, were now replaced by the hale and vigorous snorting of the Trades, the roll of breakers to landward, and the unremitting gallop of the unnumbered multitudes of gray-green seas, careering silently past the schooner, their crests occasionally hissing into brusque eruptions of white froth, or smiting broad on under her counter, showering her decks with a sprout of icy spray. It was cold; at times thick fogs cloaked all the world of water. To the east a procession of bleak hills defiled slowly southward; lighthouses were passed; streamers of smoke on the western horizon marked the passage of steamships; and once they met and passed close by a huge Cape Horner, a great deep-sea tramp, all sails set and drawing, rolling slowly and leisurely in seas that made the schooner dance.

At last the Farallones looked over the ocean's edge to the north; then came the whistling-buoy, the Seal Rocks, the Heads, Point Reyes, the Golden Gate flanked with the old red Presidio, Lime Point with its watching cannon; and by noon of a gray and boisterous day, under a lusty wind and a slant of rain, just five months after her departure, the "Bertha Millner" let go her anchor in San Francisco Bay some few hundred yards off the Lifeboat Station.

In this berth the schooner was still three or four miles from the city and the water-front. But Moran detested any nearer approach to civilization, and Wilbur himself was willing to avoid, at least for one day, the publicity which he believed the "Bertha's" reappearance was sure to attract. He remembered, too, that the little boat

carried with her a fortune of $100,000, and decided that until it could be safely landed and stored it was not desirable that its existence should be known along "the Front."

For days, weeks even, Wilbur had looked eagerly forward to this return to his home. He had seen himself again in his former haunts, in his club, and in the houses along Pacific avenue where he was received; but no sooner had the anchor-chain ceased rattling in the "Bertha's" hawse-pipe than a strange revulsion came upon him. The new man that seemed to have so suddenly sprung to life within him, the Wilbur who was the mate of the "Bertha Millner," the Wilbur who belonged to Moran, believed that he could see nothing to be desired in city life. For him was the unsteady deck of a schooner, and the great winds and the tremendous wheel of the ocean's rim, and the horizon that ever fled before his following prow; so he told himself, so he believed. What attractions could the city offer him? What amusements? what excitements? He had been flung off the smoothly spinning circumference of well-ordered life out into the void.

He had known romance, and the spell of the great, simple, and primitive emotions; he had sat down to eat with buccaneers; he had seen the fierce, quick leap of unleashed passions, and had felt death swoop close at his nape and pass like a swift spurt of cold air. City life, his old life, had no charm for him now. Wilbur honestly believed that he was changed to his heart's core. He thought that, like Moran, he was henceforth to be a sailor of the sea, a rover, and he saw the rest of his existence passed with her, aboard their faithful little schooner. They would have the whole round world as their playground; they held the earth and the great seas in fief; there was no one to let or to hinder. They two belonged to each other. Once outside the Heads again, and they swept the land of cities and of little things behind them, and they two were left alone once more; alone in the great world of romance.

About an hour after her arrival off the station, while Hoang and the hands were furling the jib and foresail and getting the dory over the side, Moran remarked to Wilbur:

"It's good we came in when we did, mate; the glass is going down fast, and the wind's breezing up from the west; we're going to have a blow; the tide will be going out in a little while, and we never could have come in against wind and tide."

"Moran," said Wilbur, "I'm going ashore—into the station here; there's a telephone line there; see the wires? I can't so much as

turn my hand over before I have some shore-going clothes. What do you suppose they would do to me if I appeared on Kearney Street in this outfit? I'll ring up Langley & Michaels—they are the wholesale chemists in town—and have their agent come out here and talk business to us about our ambergris. We've got to pay the men their prize-money; then as soon as we get our own money in hand we can talk about overhauling and outfitting the 'Bertha.'"

Moran refused to accompany him ashore and into the Lifeboat Station. Roofed houses were an object of suspicion to her. Already she had begun to be uneasy at the distant sight of the city of San Francisco, Nob, Telegraph, Russian, and Rincon hills, all swarming with buildings and grooved with streets; even the land-locked harbor fretted her. Wilbur could see she felt imprisoned, confined. When he had pointed out the Palace Hotel to her—a vast gray cube in the distance, overtopping the surrounding roofs—she had sworn under her breath.

"And people can live there, good heavens! Why not rabbit-burrows, and be done with it? Mate, how soon can we be out to sea again? I hate this place."

Wilbur found the captain of the Lifeboat Station in the act of sitting down to a dinner of boiled beef and cabbage. He was a strongly built well-looking man, with the air more of a soldier than a sailor. He had already been studying the schooner through his front window and had recognized her, and at once asked Wilbur news of Captain Kitchell. Wilbur told him as much of his story as was necessary, but from the captain's talk he gathered that the news of his return had long since been wired from Coronado, and that it would be impossible to avoid a nine days' notoriety. The captain of the station (his name was Hodgson) made Wilbur royally welcome, insisted upon his dining with him, and himself called up Langley & Michaels as soon as the meal was over.

It was he who offered the only plausible solution of the mystery of the lifting and shaking of the schooner and the wrecking of the junk. Though Wilbur was not satisfied with Hodgson's explanation, it was the only one he ever heard.

When he had spoken of the matter, Hodgson had nodded his head. "Sulphur-bottoms," he said.

"Sulphur-bottoms?"

"Yes; they're a kind of right-whale; they get barnacles and a kind of marine lice on their backs, and come up and scratch themselves against a ship's keel, just like a hog under a fence."

When Wilbur's business was done, and he was making ready to return to the schooner, Hodgson remarked suddenly: "Hear you've got a strapping fine girl aboard with you. Where did you fall in with her?" and he winked and grinned.

Wilbur started as though struck, and took himself hurriedly away; but the man's words had touched off in his brain a veritable mine of conjecture. Moran in Magdalena Bay was consistent, congruous, and fitted into her environment. But how—how was Wilbur to explain her to San Francisco, and how could his behavior seem else than ridiculous to the men of his club and to the women whose dinner invitations he was wont to receive? They could not understand the change that had been wrought in him; they did not know Moran, the savage, half-tamed Valkyrie so suddenly become a woman. Hurry as he would, the schooner could not be put to sea again within a fortnight. Even though he elected to live aboard in the meanwhile, the very business of her preparation would call him to the city again and again. Moran could not be kept a secret. As it was, all the world knew of her by now. On the other hand, he could easily understand her position; to her it seemed simplicity itself that they two who loved each other should sail away and pass their lives together upon the sea, as she and her father had done before.

Like most men, Wilbur had to walk when he was thinking hard. He sent the dory back to the schooner with word to Moran that he would take a walk around the beach and return in an hour or two. He set off along the shore in the direction of Fort Mason, the old red-brick fort at the entrance to the Golden Gate. At this point in the Presidio Government reservation the land is solitary. Wilbur followed the line of the beach to the old fort; and there, on the very threshold of the Western world, at the very outpost of civilization, sat down in the lee of the crumbling fortification, and scene by scene reviewed the extraordinary events of the past six months.

In front of him ran the narrow channel of the Golden Gate; to his right was the bay and the city; at his left the open Pacific.

He saw himself the day of his advent aboard the "Bertha" in his top hat and frock coat; saw himself later "braking down" at the windlass, the "Petrel" within hailing distance.

Then the pictures began to thicken fast: the derelict bark "Lady Letty" rolling to her scuppers, abandoned and lonely; the "boy" in the wheel-box; Kitchell wrenching open the desk in the captain's stateroom; Captain Sternersen buried at sea, his false teeth upside

down; the black fury of the squall, and Moran at the wheel; Moran lying at full length on the deck, getting the altitude of a star; Magdalena Bay; the shark-fishing; the mysterious lifting and shuddering of the schooner; the beach-combers' junk, with its staring red eyes; Hoang, naked to the waist, gleaming with sweat and whale-oil; the ambergris; the race to beach the sinking schooner; the never-to-be-forgotten night when he and Moran had camped together on the beach; Hoang taken prisoner, and the hideous filing of his teeth; the beach-combers, silent and watchful behind their sand breastworks; the Chinaman he had killed twitching and hiccoughing at his feet; Moran turned Berserker, bursting down upon him through a haze of smoke; Charlie dying in the hammock aboard the schooner, ordering his funeral with its "four-piecee horse"; Coronado; the incongruous scene in the ballroom; and, last of all, Josie Herrick in white duck and kid shoes, giving her hand to Moran in her boots and belt, hatless as ever, her sleeves rolled up to above the elbows, her white, strong arm extended, her ruddy face, and pale, milk-blue eyes gravely observant, her heavy braids, yellow as ripening rye, hanging over her shoulder and breast.

A sudden explosion of cold wind, striking down blanket-wise and bewildering from out the west, made Wilbur look up quickly. The gray sky seemed scudding along close overhead. The bay, the narrow channel of the Golden Gate, the outside ocean, were all whitening with crests of waves. At his feet the huge green ground-swells thundered to the attack of the fort's granite foundations. Through the Gate, the bay seemed rushing out to the Pacific. A bewildered gull shot by, tacking and slanting against the gusts that would drive it out to sea. Evidently the storm was not far off. Wilbur rose to his feet, and saw the "Bertha Millner," close in, unbridled and free as a runaway horse, headed directly for the open sea, and rushing on with all the impetus of wind and tide!

XIV

THE OCEAN IS CALLING FOR YOU

A LITTLE while after Wilbur had set off for the station, while Moran was making the last entries in the log-book, seated at the table in the cabin, Jim appeared at the door.

"Well," she said, looking up.

"China boy him want go asho' plenty big, seeum flen up Chinatown in um city."

"Shore leave, is it?" said Moran. "You deserted once before without even saying good-by; and my hand in the fire, you'll come back this time dotty with opium. Get away with you. We'll have men aboard here in a few days."

"Can go?" inquired Jim suavely.

"I said so. Report our arrival to your Six Companies."

Hoang rowed Jim and the coolies ashore, and then returned to the schooner with the dory and streamed her astern. As he passed the cabin door on his way forward, Moran hailed him.

"I thought you went ashore?" she cried.

"Heap flaid," he answered. "Him other boy go up Chinatown; him tell Sam Yup; I tink Sam Yup alla same killee me. I no leaveum ship two, thlee day; bimeby I go Olegon. I stay topside ship. You wantum cook. I cook plenty fine; standum watch for you."

Indeed, ever since leaving Coronado the ex-beach-comber had made himself very useful about the schooner; had been, in fact, obsequiousness itself, and seemed to be particularly desirous of gaining the good-will of the "Bertha's" officers. He understood pigeon English better than Jim, and spoke it even better than Charlie had done. He acted the part of interpreter between Wilbur and the hands; even turned to in the galley upon occasion; and of his own accord offered to give the vessel a coat of paint above the water-line. Moran turned back to her log, and Hoang went forward. Standing on the forward deck, he looked after the "Bertha's" coolies until they disappeared behind a row of pine-trees on the Presidio Reserva-

tion, going cityward. Wilbur was nowhere in sight. For a long time Hoang studied the Lifeboat Station narrowly, while he made a great show of coiling a length of rope. The station was just out of hailing distance. Nobody seemed stirring. The whole shore and back land thereabout was deserted; the edge of the city was four miles distant. Hoang returned to the forecastle-hatch and went below, groping under his bunk in his ditty-box.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Moran a moment later, as the beach-comber entered the cabin and shut the door behind him.

Hoang did not answer; but she did not need to repeat the question. In an instant Moran knew very well what he had come for.

"God!" she exclaimed under her breath, springing to her feet. "Why didn't we think of this!"

Hoang slipped his knife from the sleeve of his blouse. For an instant the old imperiousness, the old savage pride and anger, leaped again in Moran's breast—then died away forever. She was no longer the same Moran of that first fight on board the schooner, when the beach-combers had plundered her of her "loot." Only a few weeks ago, and she would have fought with Hoang without hesitation and without mercy; would have wrenched a leg from the table and brained him where he stood. But she had learned since to know what it meant to be dependent; to rely for protection upon some one who was stronger than she; to know her weakness; to know that she was at last a woman, and to be proud of it.

She did not fight; she had no thought of fighting. Instinctively she cried aloud, "Mate—mate!—Oh, mate, where are you? Help me!" and Hoang's knife nailed the words within her throat.

The "loot" was in a brass-bound chest under one of the cabin's bunks, stowed in two gunny-bags. Hoang drew them out, knotted the two together, and, slinging them over his shoulder, regained the deck.

He looked carefully at the angry sky and swelling seas, noting the direction of the wind and set of the tide; then went forward and cast the anchor-chains from the windlass in such a manner that the schooner must inevitably wrench free with the first heavy strain. The dory was still tugging at the line astern. Hoang dropped the sacks in the boat, swung himself over the side, and rowed calmly toward the station's wharf. If any notion of putting to sea with the schooner had entered the obscure, perverted cun-

ning of his mind, he had almost instantly rejected it. Chinatown was his aim; once there and under the protection of his Tong, Hoang knew that he was safe. He knew the hiding-places that the See Yup Association provided for its members—hiding places whose very existence was unknown to the police of the White Devil.

No one interrupted—no one even noticed—his passage to the station. At best, it was nothing more than a coolie carrying a couple of gunny-sacks across his shoulder. Two hours later, Hoang was lost in San Francisco's Chinatown.

. . . . . .

At the sight of the schooner sweeping out to sea, Wilbur was for an instant smitten rigid. What had happened? Where was Moran? Why was there nobody on board? A swift, sharp sense of some unnamed calamity leaped suddenly at his throat. Then he was aware of a clattering of hoofs along the road that led to the fort. Hodgson threw himself from one of the horses that were used in handling the surf-boat, and ran to him hatless and panting.

"My God!" he shouted. "Look, your schooner, do you see her? She broke away after I'd started to tell you—to tell you—to tell you—your girl there on board— It was horrible!"

"Is she all right?" cried Wilbur, at top voice, for the clamor of the gale was increasing every second.

"All right! No; they've killed her—somebody—the coolies, I think—knifed her! I went out to ask you people to come into the station to have supper with me—"

"Killed her—killed her! Who? I don't believe you—"

"Wait—to have supper with me, and I found her there on the cabin floor. She was still breathing. I carried her up on deck—there was nobody else aboard. I carried her up and laid her on the deck—and she died there. Just now I came after you to tell you, and—"

"Good God Almighty, man! who killed her? Where is she? Oh—but of course it isn't true! How did you know? Moran killed! Moran killed!"

"And the schooner broke away after I started!"

"Moran killed! But—but—she's not dead yet; we'll have to see—"

"She died on the deck; I brought her up and laid her on—"

"How do you know she's dead? Where is she? Come on, we'll go right back to her—to the station!"

"She's on board—out there!"

"Where—where is she? My God, man, tell me where she is!"

"Out there aboard the schooner. I brought her up on deck—I left her on the schooner—on the deck—she was stabbed in the throat—and then came after you to tell you. Then the schooner broke away while I was coming; she's drifting out to sea now!"

"Where is she? Where is she?"

"Who—the girl—the schooner—which one? The girl is on the schooner—and the schooner—that's her, right there—she's drifting out to sea!"

Wilbur put both hands to his temples, closing his eyes.

"I'll go back!" exclaimed Hodgson. "We'll have the surf-boat out and get after her; we'll bring the body back!"

"No, no!" cried Wilbur, "it's better—this way. Leave her, let her go—she's going out to sea again!"

"But the schooner won't live two hours outside in this weather; she'll go down!"

"It's better—that way—let her go. I want it so!"

"I can't stay!" cried the other again. "If the patrol should sig- storm coming up, and I've got to be at my station."

Wilbur did not answer; he was watching the schooner.

"I can't stay!" cried the other again. "If the patrol should signal—I can't stop here, I must be on duty. Come back, you can't do anything!"

"No!"

"I have got to go!" Hodgson ran back, swung himself on the horse, and rode away at a furious gallop, inclining his head against the gusts.

And the schooner in a world of flying spray, white scud, and driving spoondrift, her cordage humming, her forefoot churning, the flag at her peak straining stiff in the gale, came up into the narrow passage of the Golden Gate, riding high upon the outgoing tide. On she came, swinging from crest to crest of the waves that kept her company and that ran to meet the ocean, shouting and calling out beyond there under the low, scudding clouds.

Wilbur had climbed to the top of the old fort. Erect upon its granite ledge he stood, and watched and waited.

Not once did the "Bertha Millner" falter in her race. Like an unbitted horse, all restraint shaken off, she ran free toward the ocean as to her pasture-land. She came nearer, nearer, rising and rolling with the seas, her bowsprit held due west, pointing like a finger out to sea, to the west—out to the world of romance. And

then at last, as the little vessel drew opposite the old fort and passed not one hundred yards away, Wilbur, watching from the rampart, saw Moran lying upon the deck with outstretched arms and calm, upturned face; lying upon the deck of that lonely fleeing schooner as upon a bed of honor, still and calm, her great braids smooth upon her breast, her arms wide; alone with the sea; alone in death as she had been in life. She passed out of his life as she had come into it—alone, upon a derelict ship, abandoned to the sea. She went out with the tide, out with the storms; out, out, out to the great gray Pacific that knew her and loved her, and that shouted and called for her, and thundered in the joy of her as she came to meet him like a bride to meet a bridegroom.

"Good-by, Moran!" shouted Wilbur as she passed. "Good-by, good-by, Moran! You were not for me—not for me! The ocean is calling for you, dear; don't you hear him? Don't you hear him? Good-by, good-by, good-by!"

The schooner swept by, shot like an arrow through the swirling currents of the Golden Gate, and dipped and bowed and courtesied to the Pacific that reached toward her his myriad curling fingers. They infolded her, held her close, and drew her swiftly, swiftly out to the great heaving bosom, tumultuous and beating in its mighty joy, its savage exultation of possession.

Wilbur stood watching. The little schooner lessened in the distance—became a shadow in mist and flying spray—a shadow moving upon the face of the great waste of water. Fainter and fainter she grew, vanished, reappeared, was heaved up again—a mere speck upon the western sky—a speck that dwindled and dwindled, then slowly melted away into the gray of the horizon.

THE END

ESSAYS ON AUTHORSHIP

BY

FRANK NORRIS

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ESSAYS ON AUTHORSHIP

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NOVELIST

It is not here a question of the "unarrived," the "unpublished"; these are the care-free irresponsibilities whose hours are halycon and whose endeavors have all the lure, all the recklessness of adventure. They are not recognized; they have made no standards for themselves, and if they play the *saltimbanque* and the charlatan nobody cares and nobody (except themselves) is affected.

But the writers in question are the successful ones who have made a public and to whom some ten, twenty or a hundred thousand people are pleased to listen. You may believe if you choose that the novelist, of all workers, is independent—that he can write what he pleases, and that certainly, certainly he should never "write down to his readers"—that he should never consult them at all.

On the contrary, I believe it can be proved that the successful novelist should be more than all others limited in the nature and character of his work, more than all others he should be careful of what he says; more than all others he should defer to his audience; more than all others—more even than the minister and the editor—he should feel "his public" and watch his every word, testing carefully his every utterance, weighing with the most relentless precision his every statement; in a word, possess a sense of his responsibilities.

For the novel is the great expression of modern life. Each form of art has had its turn at reflecting and expressing its contemporaneous thought. Time was when the world looked to the architects of the castles and great cathedrals to truly reflect and embody its ideals. And the architects—serious, earnest men—produced such "expressions of contemporaneous thought" as the Castle of Coucy and the Church of Notre Dame. Then with other times came other customs, and the painters had their day. The men of the Renaissance trusted Angelo and Da Vinci and Velas-

quez to speak for them, and trusted not in vain. Next came the age of drama. Shakespeare and Marlowe found the value of *x* for the life and the times in which they lived. Later on contemporary life had been so modified that neither painting, architecture nor drama was the best vehicle of expression, the day of the longer poems arrived, and Pope and Dryden spoke for their fellows.

Thus the sequence. Each age speaks with its own peculiar organ, and has left the Word for us moderns to read and understand. The Castle of Coucy and the Church of Notre Dame are the spoken words of the Middle Ages. The Renaissance speaks—and intelligibly—to us through the sibyls of the Sistine chapel and the Mona Lisa. "Macbeth" and "Tamerlane" *résumé* the whole spirit of the Elizabethan age, while the "Rape of the Lock" is a wireless message to us straight from the period of the Restoration.

To-day is the day of the novel. In no other day and by no other vehicle is contemporaneous life so adequately expressed; and the critics of the twenty-second century, reviewing our times, striving to reconstruct our civilization, will look not to the painters, not to the architects nor dramatists, but to the novelists to find our idiosyncrasy.

I think this is true. I think if the matter could in any way be statisticized, the figures would bear out the assumption. There is no doubt the novel will in time "go out" of popular favor as irrevocably as the long poem has gone and for the reason that it is no longer the right mode of expression.

It is interesting to speculate upon what will take its place. Certainly the coming civilization will revert to no former means of expressing its thought or its ideals. Possibly music will be the interpreter of the life of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries. Possibly one may see a hint of this in the characterization of Wagner's operas as the "Music of the Future."

This, however, is parenthetical and beside the mark. Remains the fact that to-day is the day of the novel. By this one does not mean that the novel is merely popular. If the novel was not something more than a simple diversion, a means of whiling away a dull evening, a long railway journey, it would not, believe me, remain in favor another day.

If the novel, then, is popular, it is popular with a reason, a vital, inherent reason; that is to say, it is essential. Essential—to resume once more the proposition—because it expresses modern life better than architecture, better than painting, better than poetry, better than

music. It is as necessary to the civilization of the twentieth century as the violin is necessary to Kubelik, as the piano is necessary to Paderewski, as the plane is necessary to the carpenter, the sledge to the blacksmith, the chisel to the mason. It is an instrument, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle. It is that thing which, in the hand of man, makes him civilized and no longer savage, because it gives him a power of durable, permanent expression. So much for the novel—the instrument.

Because it is so all-powerful to-day, the people turn to him who wields this instrument with every degree of confidence. They expect—and rightly—that results shall be commensurate with means. The unknown archer who grasps the bow of Ulysses may be expected by the multitude to send his shaft far and true. If he is not true nor strong he has no business with the bow. The people give heed to him only because he bears a great weapon. He himself knows before he shoots whether or no he is worthy.

It is all very well to jeer at the People and at the People's misunderstanding of the arts, but the fact is indisputable that no art that is not in the end understood by the People can live or ever did live a single generation. In the larger view, in the last analysis, the People pronounce the final judgment. The People, despised of the artist, hooted, caricatured and vilified, are, after all, and in the main, the real seekers after Truth. Who is it, after all, whose interest is liveliest in any given work of art? It is not now a question of *esthetic* interest—that is, the artist's, the amateur's, the *cognoscente's*. It is a question of *vital* interest. Say what you will, Maggie Tulliver—for instance—is far more a living being for Mrs. Jones across the street than she is for your sensitive, fastidious, keenly critical artist, litterateur, or critic. The People—Mrs. Jones and her neighbors—take the life history of these fictitious characters, these novels, to heart with a seriousness that the esthetic cult have no conception of. The cult consider them almost solely from their artistic sides. The People take them into their innermost lives. Nor do the People discriminate. Omnivorous readers as they are to-day, they make little distinction between Maggie Tulliver and the heroine of the last "popular novel." They do not stop to separate true from false; they do not care.

How necessary it becomes, then, for those who, by the simple art of writing, can invade the heart's heart of thousands, whose novels are received with such measureless earnestness—how necessary it becomes for those who wield such powers to use it rightfully.

Is it not expedient to act fairly? Is it not in Heaven's name essential that the People hear, not a lie, but the Truth?

If the novel were not one of the most important factors of modern life; if it were not the completest expression of our civilization; if its influence were not greater than all the pulpits, than all the newspapers between the oceans, it would not be so important that its message should be true.

But the novelist to-day is the one who reaches the greatest audience. Right or wrong, the People turn to him the moment he speaks, and what he says they believe.

For the Million, Life is a contracted affair, is bounded by the walls of the narrow channel of affairs in which their feet are set. They have no horizon. They look to-day as they never have looked before, as they never will look again, to the writer of fiction to give them an idea of life beyond their limits, and they believe him as they never have believed before and never will again.

This being so, is it not difficult to understand how certain of these successful writers of fiction—these favored ones into whose hands the gods have placed the great bow of Ulysses—can look so frivolously upon their craft? It is not necessary to specify. One speaks of those whose public is measured by "one hundred and fifty thousand copies sold." We know them, and because the gods have blessed us with wits beyond our deserving we know their work is false. But what of the "hundred and fifty thousand" who are not discerning and who receive this falseness as Truth, who believe this topsy-turvy picture of Life beyond their horizons is real and vital and sane?

There is no gauge to measure the extent of this malignant influence. Public opinion is made no one can say how, by infinitesimal accretions, by a multitude of minutest elements. Lying novels, surely, surely in this day and age of indiscriminate reading, contribute to this more than all other influences of present-day activity.

The Pulpit, the Press and the Novel—these indisputably are the great molders of public opinion and public morals to-day. But the Pulpit speaks but once a week; the Press is read with lightning haste and the morning news is waste-paper by noon. But the novel goes into the home to stay. It is read word for word; is talked about, discussed; its influence penetrates every chink and corner of the family.

Yet novelists are not found wanting who write for money. I do not think this is an unfounded accusation. I do not think it is ask-

ing too much of credulity. This would not matter if they wrote the Truth. But these gentlemen who are "in literature for their own pocket every time" have discovered that for the moment the People have confounded the Wrong with the Right, and prefer that which is a lie to that which is true. "Very well, then," say these gentlemen. "If they want a lie they shall have it"; and they give the People a lie in return for royalties.

The surprising thing about this is that you and I and all the rest of us do not consider this as disreputable—do not yet realize that the novelist has responsibilities. We condemn an editor who sells his editorial columns, and we revile the pulpit attainted of venality. But the venal novelist—he whose influence is greater than either the Press or Pulpit—*him* we greet with a wink and the tongue in the cheek.

This should not be so. Somewhere the protest should be raised, and those of us who see the practice of this fraud should bring home to ourselves the realization that the selling of one hundred and fifty thousand books is a serious business. The People have a right to the Truth as they have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is *not* right that they be exploited and deceived with false views of life, false characters, false sentiment, false morality, false history, false philosophy, false emotions, false heroism, false notions of self-sacrifice, false views of religion, of duty, of conduct and of manners.

The man who can address an audience of one hundred and fifty thousand people who—unenlightened—*believe what he says,* has a heavy duty to perform, and tremendous responsibilities to shoulder; and he should address himself to his task not with the flippancy of a catch-penny juggler at the county fair, but with earnestness, with soberness, with a sense of his limitations, and with all the abiding sincerity that by the favor and mercy of the gods may be his.

THE TRUE REWARD OF THE NOVELIST

Not that one quarrels with the historical novel as such; not that one does not enjoy good fiction wherever found, and in whatever class. It is the method of attack of the latter-day copyists that one deplores—their attitude, the willingness of so very, very many of them to take off the hat to Fashion, and then hold the same hat for Fashion to drop pennies in.

Ah, but the man must be above the work or the work is worthless, and the man better off at some other work than that of producing fiction. The eye never once should wander to the gallery, but be always with single purpose turned *inward* upon the work, testing it and retesting it that it rings true.

What one quarrels with is the perversion of a profession, the detestable trading upon another man's success. No one can find fault with those few good historical novels that started the fad. There was good workmanship in these, and honesty. But the copyists, the fakirs—they are not novelists at all, though they write novels that sell by the hundreds of thousands. They are business men. They find out—no, they allow *some one else* to find out—what the public wants, and they give it to the public cheap, and advertise it as a new soap is advertised. Well, they make money; and if that is their aim—if they are content to prostitute the good name of American literature for a sliding scale of royalties—let's have done with them. They have their reward. But the lamentable result will be that these copyists will in the end so prejudice the people against an admirable school of fiction—the school of Scott—that for years to come the tale of historic times will be discredited and many a great story remain unwritten, and many a man of actual worth and real power held back in the ranks for very shame of treading where so many fools have rushed in.

For the one idea of the fakir—the copyist—and of the public which for the moment listens to him, is Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, first, last, and always Clothes. Not Clothes only in the sense of doublet and gown, but Clothes of speech, Clothes of manner, Clothes

of customs. Hear them expatiate over the fashion of wearing a cuff, over a trick of speech, over the architecture of a house, the archæology of armor and the like. It is all well enough in its way, but so easily dispensed with if there be flesh and blood underneath. Veronese put the people of his "Marriage at Cana" into the clothes of his contemporaries. Is the picture any less a masterpiece?

Do these Little People know that Scott's archæology was about one thousand years "out" in Ivanhoe, and that to make a parallel we must conceive of a writer describing Richelieu—say—in small clothes and a top hat? But is it not *Richelieu* we want, and *Ivanhoe*, not their clothes, their armor? And in spite of his errors Scott gave us a real Ivanhoe. He got beneath the clothes of an epoch and got the heart of it, and the spirit of it (different essentially and vitally from ours or from every other, the spirit of feudalism); and he put forth a masterpiece.

The Little People so very precise in the matter of buttons and "bacinets" do not so. Take the clothes from the people of their Romances and one finds only wooden manikins. Take the clothes from the epoch of which they pretend to treat and what is there beneath? It is only the familiar, well-worn, well-thumbed nineteenth or twentieth century after all. As well have written of Michigan Avenue, Chicago, as "La Rue de la Harpe," "The Great North Road" or the "Appian Way."

It is a masquerade, the novel of the copyists; and the people who applaud them—are they not the same who would hold persons in respect because of the finery of their bodies? A poor taste, a cheap one; the taste of serving-men, the literature of chambermaids.

To approach the same subject by a different radius: why must the historical novel of the copyist always be conceived of in the terms of Romance? Could not the formula of Realism be applied at least as well, not the Realism of mere externals (the copyists have that), but the Realism of motives and emotions? What would we not give for a picture of the fifteenth century as precise and perfect as one of Mr. James's novels? Even if that be impossible, the attempt, even though half-way successful, would be worth while, would be better than the wooden manikin in the tin-pot helmet and baggy hose. At least we should get somewhere, even if no further than Mr. Kingsley took us in "Hereward," or Mr. Blackmore in "Lorna Doone."

How about the business life and the student life, and the artisan life and the professional life, and above all, the home life of historic periods? Great Heavens! There was something else sometimes than the soldier life. There were not always cutting and thrusting, not always night-riding, escaping, venturing, posing.

Or suppose that cut-and-thrust must be the order of the day, where is the "man behind," and the heart in the man and the spirit in the heart and the essential vital, elemental, all-important true life within the spirit? We are all Anglo-Saxons enough to enjoy the sight of a fight, would go a block or so out of the way to see one, or be a dollar or so out of pocket. But let it not be these jointed manikins worked with a thread. At least let it be Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons or Mr. James Jeffries.

Clothes, paraphernalia, panoply, pomp and circumstance, and the copyist's public and the poor bedeviled, ink-corroded hack of an overdriven, underpaid reviewer on an inland paper speak of the "vivid coloring" and "the fine picture of a bygone age"—it is easy to be vivid with a pot of vermilion at the elbow. Any one can scare a young dog with a false face and a roaring voice, but to be vivid and use grays and browns, to scare the puppy with the lifted finger, that's something to the point.

The difficult thing is to get at the life immediately around you —the very life in which you move. No romance in it? No romance in *you*, poor fool. As much romance on Michigan Avenue as there is realism in King Arthur's court. It is as you choose to see it. The important thing to decide is, which formula is the best to help you grip the Real Life of this or any other age. Contemporaries always imagine that theirs is the prosaic age, and that chivalry and the picturesque died with their forebears. No doubt Merlin mourned for the old time of romance. Cervantes held that romance was dead. Yet most of the historical romances of the day are laid in Cervantes's time, or even after it.

Romance and Realism are constant qualities of every age, day and hour. They are here to-day. They existed in the time of Job. They will continue to exist till the end of time, not so much in things as in point of view of the people who see things.

The difficulty, then, is to get at the immediate life—immensely difficult, for you are not only close to the canvas, but are yourself part of the picture.

But the historic age is almost done to hand. Let almost any

one shut himself in his closet with a history and Violet LeDuc's "Dictionaire du Mobilier," and, given a few months' time, he can evolve a historical novel of the kind called popular. He need not know men—just clothes and lingo, the "what-ho-without-there" gabble. But if he only chose he could find romance and adventure in Wall Street or Bond Street. But romance there does not wear the gay clothes and the showy accoutrements, and to discover it—the real romance of it—means hard work and close study, not of books, but of people and actualities.

Not only this, but to know the life around you, you must live—if not *among* people, then *in* people. You must be something more than a novelist if you can, something more than just a writer. There must be that nameless sixth sense or sensibility in you that great musicians have in common with great inventors and great scientists; the thing that does not enter into the work, but that is back of it; the thing that would make of you a good *man* as well as a good novelist; the thing that differentiates the mere business man from the financier (for it is possessed of the financier and poet alike—so only they be big enough).

It is not genius, for genius is a lax, loose term, so flippantly used that its expressiveness is long since lost. It is more akin to sincerity. And there once more we halt upon the great word—sincerity, sincerity, and again sincerity. Let the writer attack his historical novel with sincerity and he can not then do wrong. He will see then the man beneath the clothes, and the heart beneath both, and he will be so amazed at the wonder of that sight that he will forget the clothes. His public will be small, perhaps, but he will have the better reward of the knowledge of a thing well done. Royalties on editions of hundreds of thousands will not pay him more to his satisfaction than that. To make money is not the province of a novelist. If he is the right sort, he has other responsibilities, heavy ones. He of all men can not think only of himself or for himself. And when the last page is written and the ink crusts on the pen-point and the hungry presses go clashing after another writer, the "new man" and the new fashion of the hour, he will think of the grim long grind of the years of his life that he has put behind him and of his work that he has built up volume by volume, sincere work, telling the truth as he saw it, independent of fashion and the gallery gods, holding to these with gripped hands and shut teeth—he will think of all this then, and he will be able to say: "I never truckled; I never took off the hat to Fashion and

held it out for pennies. By God, I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth; I knew it for the truth then, and I know it for the truth now."

And that is his reward—the best that a man may know; the only one really worth the striving for.

THE NOVEL WITH A "PURPOSE"

After years of indoctrination and expostulation on the part of the artists, the people who read appear at last to have grasped this one precept—"the novel must not preach," but "the purpose of the story must be subordinate to the story itself." It took a very long time for them to understand this, but once it became apparent they fastened upon it with a tenacity comparable only to the tenacity of the American schoolboy to the date "1492." "The novel must not preach," you hear them say.

As though it were possible to write a novel without a purpose, even if it is only the purpose to amuse. One is willing to admit that this savors a little of quibbling, for "purpose" and purpose to amuse are two different purposes. But every novel, even the most frivolous, must have some reason for the writing of it, and in that sense must have a "purpose."

Every novel must do one of three things—it must (1) tell something, (2) show something, or (3) prove something. Some novels do all three of these; some do only two; all must do at least one.

The ordinary novel merely tells something, elaborates a complication, devotes itself primarily to *things*. In this class comes the novel of adventure, such as "The Three Musketeers."

The second and better class of novel shows something, exposes the workings of a temperament, devotes itself primarily to the minds of human beings. In this class falls the novel of character, such as "Romola."

The third, and what we hold to be the best class, proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man. In this class falls the novel with the purpose, such as "Les Miserables."

And the reason we decide upon this last as the highest form of the novel is because that, though setting a great purpose before it as its task, it nevertheless includes, and is forced to include, both

the other classes. It must tell something, must narrate vigorous incidents and must show something, must penetrate deep into the motives and character of typemen, men who are composite pictures of a multitude of men. It must do this because of the nature of its subject, for it deals with elemental forces, motives that stir whole nations. These can not be handled as abstractions in fiction. Fiction can find expression only in the concrete. The elemental forces, then, contribute to the novel with a purpose to provide it with vigorous action. In the novel, force can be expressed in no other way. The social tendencies must be expressed by means of analysis of the characters of the men and women who compose that society, and the two must be combined and manipulated to evolve the purpose—to find the value of *x*.

The production of such a novel is probably the most arduous task that the writer of fiction can undertake. Nowhere else is success more difficult; nowhere else is failure so easy. Unskilfully treated, the story may dwindle down and degenerate into mere special pleading, and the novelist become a polemicist, a pamphleteer, forgetting that, although his first consideration is to prove his case, his *means* must be living human beings, not statistics, and that his tools are not figures, but pictures from life as he sees it. The novel with a purpose *is*, one contends, a preaching novel. But it preaches by tellings things and showing things. Only, the author selects from the great storehouse of actual life the things to be told and the things to be shown which shall bear upon his problem, his purpose. The preaching, the moralizing, is the result not of direct appeal by the writer, but is made—should be made—to the reader by the very incidents of the story.

But here is presented a strange anomaly, a distinction as subtle as it is vital. Just now one has said that in the composition of the kind of novel under consideration the *purpose* is for the novelist the all-important thing, and yet it is impossible to deny that the *story*, as a mere story, is to the story-writer the one great object of attention. How reconcile then these two apparent contradictions?

For the novelist, the purpose of his novel, the problem he is to solve, is to his story what the keynote is to the sonata. Though the musician can not exaggerate the importance of the keynote, yet the thing that interests him is the sonata itself. The keynote simply co-ordinates the music, systematizes it, brings all the myriad little rebellious notes under a single harmonious code.

Thus, too, the purpose in the novel. It is important as an end

and also as an ever-present guide. For the writer it is important only as a note to which his work must be attuned. The moment, however, that the writer becomes really and vitally interested in his purpose his novel fails.

Here is the strange anomaly. Let us suppose that Hardy, say, should be engaged upon a story which had for purpose to show the injustices under which the miners of Wales were suffering. It is conceivable that he could write a story that would make the blood boil with indignation. But he himself, if he is to remain an artist, if he is to write his novel successfully, will, as a novelist, care very little about the iniquitous labor system of the Welsh coal-mines. It will be to him as impersonal a thing as the key is to the composer of a sonata. As a man Hardy may or may not be vitally concerned in the Welsh coal-miner. That is quite unessential. But as a novelist, as an artist, his sufferings must be for him a matter of the mildest interest. They are important, for they constitute his keynote. They are *not* interesting for the reason that the working out of his *story*, its people, episodes, scenes, and pictures is for the moment the most interesting thing in all the world to him, exclusive of everything else. Do you think that Mrs. Stowe was more interested in the slave question than she was in the writing of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"? Her book, her manuscript, the page-to-page progress of the narrative. were more absorbing to her than all the Negroes that were ever whipped or sold. Had it not been so that great purpose-novel never would have succeeded.

Consider the reverse—"Fecondité," for instance. The purpose for which Zola wrote the book ran away with him. He really did care more for the depopulation of France than he did for his novel. Result—sermons on the fruitfulness of women, special pleading, a farrago of dry, dull incidents overburdened and collapsing under the weight of a theme that should have intruded only indirectly.

This is pre-eminently a selfish view of the question, but it is assuredly the only correct one. It must be remembered that the artist has a double personality: himself as a man, and himself as an artist. But, it will be urged, how account for the artist's sympathy in his fictitious characters, his emotion, the actual tears he sheds in telling of their griefs, their deaths, and the like?

The answer is obvious. As an artist his sensitiveness is quickened because they are characters in his novel. It does not at all follow that the same artist would be moved to tears over the report of

parallel catastrophes in real life. As an artist, there is every reason to suppose he would welcome the news with downright pleasure. It would be for him "good material." He would see a story in it, a good scene, a great character. Thus the artist. What he would do, how he would feel as a man is quite a different matter.

To conclude, let us consider one objection urged against the novel with a purpose by the plain people who read. For certain reasons, difficult to explain, the purpose novel always ends unhappily. It is usually a record of suffering, a relation of tragedy. And the plain people say, "Ah, we see so much suffering in the world, why put it into novels? We do not want it in novels."

One confesses to very little patience with this sort. "We see so much suffering in the world already." Do they? Is this really true? The people who buy novels are the well-to-do people. They belong to a class whose whole scheme of life is concerned solely with an aim to avoid the unpleasant. Suffering, the great catastrophes, the social throes, that annihilate whole communities, or that crush even isolated individuals—all these are as far removed from them as earthquakes and tidal-waves. Or, even if it were so, suppose that by some miracle these blind eyes were opened and the sufferings of the poor, the tragedies of the house around the corner, really were laid bare. If there is much pain in life, all the more reason that it should appear in a class of literature which, in its highest form, is a sincere transcription of life.

It is the complaint of the coward, this cry against the novel with a purpose, because it brings the tragedies and griefs of others to notice. Take this element from fiction, take from it the power and opportunity to prove that injustice, crime, and inequality do exist, and what is left? Just the amusing novels, the novels that entertain. The juggler in spangles, with his balancing pole and gilt ball, does this. You may consider the modern novel from this point of view. It may be a flippant paper-covered thing of swords and cloaks, to be carried on a railway journey and to be thrown out the window when read, together with the sucked oranges and peanut shells. Or it may be a great force, that works together with the pulpit and the universities for the good of the people, fearlessly proving that power is abused, that the strong grind the faces of the weak, that an evil tree is still growing in the midst of the garden, that undoing follows hard upon unrighteousness, that the course of Empire is not yet finished, and that the races of men have yet to work out their destiny in those great and terrible movements that

crush and grind and rend asunder the pillars of the houses of the nations.

Fiction may keep pace with the Great March, but it will not be by dint of amusing the people. The Muse is a teacher, not a trickster. Her rightful place is with the leaders, but in the last analysis that place is to be attained and maintained not by cap-and-bells, but because of a serious and sincere interest, such as inspires the great teachers, the great divines, the great philosophers, a well-defined, well-seen, courageously sought-for purpose.

STORY-TELLERS *VS.* NOVELISTS

It is a thing accepted and indisputable that a story-teller is a novelist, but it has often occurred to one that the reverse is not always true and that the novelist is not of necessity a story-teller. The distinction is perhaps a delicate one, but for all that it seems to be decisive, and it is quite possible that with the distinction in mind a different judgment might be passed upon a very large part of present-day fiction. It would even be entertaining to apply the classification to the products of the standard authors.

The story-telling instinct seems to be a gift, whereas—we trend to the heretical—the art of composing novels—using the word in apposition to stories, long or short—may be an acquirement. The one is an endowment, the other an accomplishment. Accordingly, throughout the following paragraphs the expression, novelists of composition, for the time being will be used technically, and will be applied to those fiction-writers who have not the story-telling faculty.

It would not be fair to attempt a proof that the one is better or worse than the other. The difference is surely of kind and not of degree. One will only seek to establish the fact that certain eminent and brilliant novel-writers are quite bereft of a sense of fiction, that some of them have succeeded in spite of this deficiency, and that other novel-writers possessing this sense of fiction have succeeded *because* of it, and in spite of many drawbacks, such as lack of training and of education.

It is a proposition which one believes to be capable of demonstration that every child contains in himself the elements of every known profession, every occupation, every art, every industry. In the five-year-old you may see glimpses of the soldier, trader, farmer, painter, musician, builder, and so on to the end of the roster. Later, circumstances produce the atrophy of all these instincts but one, and from that one specialized comes the career. Thus every healthy-minded child—no matter if he develops in later years to be financier or boot-maker—is a story-teller. As soon as he begins to

talk he tells stories. Witness the holocausts and carnage of the leaden platoons of the nursery table, the cataclysms of the Grand Trans-Continental Playroom and Front-Hall Railroad system. This, though, is not real story-telling. The toys practically tell the story for him and are no stimulant to the imagination. However, the child goes beyond the toys. He dramatizes every object of his surroundings. The books of the library shelves are files of soldiers, the rugs are isles in the seaway of the floor, the easy chair is a comfortable old gentleman holding out his arms, the sofa a private brig or a Baldwin locomotive, and the child creates of his surroundings an entire and complex work of fiction of which he is at one and the same time hero, author and public.

Within the heart of every mature human being, not a writer of fiction, there is the withered remains of a little story-teller who died very young. And the love of good fiction and the appreciation of a fine novel in the man of the world of riper years is—I like to think—a sort of memorial tribute which he pays to his little dead playmate of so very long ago, who died very quietly with his little broken tin locomotive in his hands on the cruel day when he woke to the realization that it had outlived its usefulness and its charm.

Even in the heart of some accepted and successful fiction-writer you shall find this little dead story-teller. These are the novelists of composition, whose sense of fiction, under stress of circumstances, has become so blunted that when they come at last to full maturity and to the power of using the faculty they can no longer command it. These are novelists rather of intellect than of spontaneous improvisation; and all the force of their splendid minds, every faculty other than the lost fiction faculty, must be brought into play to compensate for the lack. Some more than compensate for it, so prodigal in resource, so persistent in effort, so powerful in energy and in fertility of invention, that—as it were by main strength—they triumph over the other writer, the natural story-teller, from whose pen the book flows with almost no effort at all.

Of this sort—the novelists of intellect, in whom the born story-teller is extinct, the novelists of composition in a word—the great example, it would seem, is George Eliot. It was by taking thought that the author of "Romola" added to her stature. The result is superb, but achieved at what infinite pains, with what colossal labor—of head rather than of the heart! She did not *feel*, she *knew*, and to attain that knowledge what effort had to be expended! Even all her art can not exclude from her pages evidences of the

labor, of the superhuman toil. And it was labor and toil for what? To get back, through years of sophistication, of solemn education, of worldly wisdom, back again to the point of view of the little lost child of the doll-house days.

But sometimes the little story-teller does not die, but lives on and grows with the man, increasing in favor with God, till at last he dominates the man himself, and the playroom of the old days simply widens its walls till it includes the street outside, and the street beyond and other streets, the whole city, the whole world, and the story-teller discovers a set of new toys to play with, and new objects of a measureless environment to dramatize about, and in exactly, *exactly* the same spirit in which he trundled his tin train through the halls and shouted boarding orders from the sofa he moves now through the world's playroom, "making up stories"; only now his heroes and his public are outside himself and he alone may play the author.

For him there is but little effort required. He has a *sense of fiction*. Every instant of his day he is dramatizing. The cable-car has for him a distinct personality. Every window in the residence quarters is an eye to the soul of the house behind. The very lamp-post on the corner, burning on through the night and through the storm, is a soldier, dutiful, vigilant in stress. A ship is Adventure; an engine a living brute; and the easy chair of his library is still the same comfortable and kindly old gentleman holding out his arms.

The men and women of his world are not apt to be—to him—so important in themselves as in relation to the whirl of things in which he chooses to involve them. They cause events, or else events happen to them, and by an unreasoned instinct the story-teller preserves the consistencies (just as the child would not have run the lines of the hall railway across the seaway of the floor between the rugs). Much thought is not necessary to him. Production is facile, a constant pleasure. The story runs from his pen almost of itself; it takes this shape or that, he knows not why; his people do this or that and by some blessed system of guesswork they are somehow always plausible and true to life. His work is haphazard, yet in the end and in the main tremendously probable. Devil-may-care, slipshod, melodramatic, but invincibly persuasive, he uses his heart, his senses, his emotions, every faculty but that of the intellect. He does not *know*; he *feels*.

Dumas was this, and "The Three Musketeers," different from

"Romola" in kind but not in degree, is just as superb as Eliot at her best. Only the Frenchman had a sense of fiction which the Englishwoman had not. Her novels are character studies, are portraits, are portrayals of emotions or pictures of certain times and certain events, are everything you choose, but they are not stories, and no stretch of the imagination, no liberalness of criticism can make them such. She succeeded by dint of effort where the Frenchman—merely wrote.

George Eliot compensated for the defect artificially and succeeded eminently and conclusively, but there are not found wanting cases—in modern literature—where "novelists of composition" have *not* compensated beyond a very justifiable doubt, and where, had they but rejoiced in a very small modicum of this dowry of the gods, their work would have been—to one's notion—infinitely improved.

As, for instance, Tolstoi; incontestably great though he be, all his unquestioned power has never yet won for him that same vivid sense of fiction enjoyed by so (comparatively) unimportant a writer as the author of "Sherlock Holmes." And of the two, judged strictly upon their merits as *story-tellers,* one claims for Mr. Doyle the securer if not the higher place, despite the magnificent genius of the novelist.

In the austere Russian—gloomy, sad, acquainted with grief—the child died irrevocably long, long ago; and no power however vast, no wisdom however profound, no effort however earnest, can turn one wheel on the little locomotive of battered tin or send it one inch along the old right-of-way between the nursery and the front room. One can not but feel that the great author of "Anna Karenina" realizes as much as his readers the limitations that the loss of this untainted childishness imposes. The power was all his, the wonderful intellectual grip, but not the fiction spirit—the child's knack and love of "making up stories." Given *that,* plus the force already his own, and what a book would have been there! The perfect novel! No doubt, clearer than all others, the great Russian sees the partial failure of his work, and no doubt keener and deeper than all others sees that, unless the child-vision and the child-pleasure be present to guide and to stimulate, the entrances of the kingdom must stay forever shut to those who would enter, storm they the gates never so mightily and beat they never so clamorously at the doors.

Whatever the end of fiction may be, whatever the reward and

recompense bestowed, whatever object is gained by good work, the end will not be gained, nor the reward won, nor the object attained by force alone—by strength of will or of mind. Without the auxiliary of the little playmate of the old days the great doors that stand at the end of the road will stay forever shut. Look once, however, with the child's eyes, or for once touch the mighty valves with the child's hand, and Heaven itself lies open with all its manifold wonders.

So that in the end, after all trial has been made and every expedient tested, the simplest way is the best and the humblest means the surest. A little child stands in the midst of the wise men and the learned, and their wisdom and their learning are set aside and they are taught that unless they become as one of these they shall in nowise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE NEED OF A LITERARY CONSCIENCE

PILATE saith unto them: "What is truth?" and it is of record that he received no answer—and for very obvious reasons. For is it not a fact, that he who asks that question must himself find the answer, and that not even one sent from Heaven can be of hope or help to him if he is not willing to go down into his own heart and into his own life to find it?

To sermonize, to elaborate a disquisition on nice distinctions of metaphysics is not appropriate here. But it is—so one believes—appropriate to consider a certain very large class of present-day novelists of the United States who seldom are stirred by that spirit of inquiry that for a moment disturbed the Roman, who do *not* ask what is truth, who do not in fact care to be truthful at all, and who—and this is the serious side of the business—are bringing the name of American literature perilously near to disrepute.

One does not quarrel for one instant with the fact that certain books of the writers in question have attained phenomenally large circulations. This is as it should be. There are very many people in the United States, and compared with such a figure as seventy million, a mere hundred thousand of books sold is no great matter.

But here—so it seems—is the point. He who can address a hundred thousand people is, no matter what his message may be, in an important position. It is a large audience, one hundred thousand, larger than any roofed building now standing could contain. Less than one-hundredth part of that number nominated Lincoln. Less than half of it won Waterloo.

And it must be remembered that for every one person who buys a book there are three who will read it and half a dozen who will read what some one else has written about it, so that the sphere of influence widens indefinitely, and the audience that the writer addresses approaches the half-million mark.

Well, and good; but if the audience is so vast, if the influence is so far-reaching, if the example set is so contagious, it becomes incumbent to ask, it becomes imperative to demand that the half-million shall be told the truth and not a lie.

And this thing called truth—"what is it?" says Pilate, and the average man conceives at once of an abstraction, a vague idea, a term borrowed from the metaphysicians, certainly nothing that has to do with practical, tangible, concrete work-a-day life.

Error! If truth is not an actual work-a-day thing, as concrete as the lamp-post on the corner, as practical as a cable-car, as real and homely and work-a-day and commonplace as a bootjack, then indeed are we of all men most miserable and our preaching vain.

And truth in fiction is just as real and just as important as truth anywhere else—as in Wall Street, for instance. A man who does not tell the truth there, and who puts the untruth upon paper over his signature, will be very promptly jailed. In the case of the Wall Street man the sum of money in question may be trivial—$100, $50. But the untruthful novelist who starts in motion something like half a million dollars invokes not fear nor yet reproach. If truth in the matter of the producing of novels is not an elusive, intangible abstraction, what, then, is it? Let us get at the hard nub of the business, something we can hold in the hand. It is the thing that is one's own, the discovery of a subject suitable for fictitious narration that has never yet been treated, and the conscientious study of that subject and the fair presentation of results. Not a difficult matter, it would appear, not an abstraction, not a philosophical kink. Newspaper reporters, who are not metaphysicians, unnamed, unrewarded, despised, even, and hooted and hounded, are doing this every day. They do it on a meagre salary, and they call the affair a "scoop." Is the standard of the novelist—he who is intrusted with the good name of his nation's literature—lower than that of a reporter?

"Ah, but it is so hard to be original," "ah, but it is so hard to discover anything new." Great Heavens! when a new life comes into the world for every tick of the watch in your pocket—a new life with all its complications, and with all the thousand and one other complications it sets in motion!

Hard to be original! when of all of those billion lives your own is as distinct, as individual, as "original," as though you were born out of season in the Paleozoic age and yours the first human face the sun ever shone upon.

Go out into the street and stand where the ways cross and hear the machinery of life work clashing in its grooves. Can the utmost resort of your ingenuity evolve a better story than any one of the

millions that jog your elbow? Shut yourself in your closet and turn your eyes inward upon yourself—deep *into* yourself, down, down into the heart of you; and the tread of the feet upon the pavement is the systole and diastole of your own being—different only in degree. It is life; and it is that which you must have to make your book, your novel—life, not other people's novels.

Or look from your window. A whole Literature goes marching by, clamoring for a leader and a master hand to guide it. You have but to step from your doorway. And instead of this, instead of entering into the leadership that is yours by right divine, instead of this, you must toilfully, painfully endeavor to crawl into the armor of the chief of some other cause, the harness of the leader of some other progress.

But you will not fit into the panoply. You may never brace that buckler upon your arm, for by your very act you stand revealed as a littler man than he who should be chief—a littler man and a weaker; and the casque will fall so far over your face that it will only blind you, and the sword will trip you, and the lance, too ponderous, will falter in your grip, and all that life which surges and thunders behind you will in time know you to be the false leader, and as you stumble will trample you in its onrush, and leave you dead and forgotten upon the road.

And just as a misconception of the truth makes of this the simplest and homeliest of things, a vagary, an abstraction and a bugbear, so it is possible that a misconception of the Leader creates the picture of a great and dreadful figure wrapped in majesty, solemn and profound. So that perhaps for very lack of self-confidence, for very diffidence, one shrinks from lifting the sword of him and from enduing one's forehead with the casque that seems so ponderous.

In other causes no doubt the leader must be chosen from the wise and great. In science and finance one looks to him to be a strong man, a swift and a sure man. But the literature that to-day shouts all in vain for its chief needs no such a one as this. Here the battle is not to the strong nor yet the race to the swift. Here the leader is no vast, stern being, profound, solemn, knowing all things, but, on the contrary, is as humble as the lowliest that follow after him. So that it need not be hard to step into that place of eminence. Not by arrogance, nor by assumption, nor by the achievement of the world's wisdom, shall you be made worthy of the place

of high command. But it will come to you, if it comes at all, because you shall have kept yourself young and humble and pure in heart, and so unspoiled and unwearied and unjaded that you shall find a joy in the mere rising of the sun, a wholesome, sane delight in the sound of the wind at night, a pleasure in the sight of the hills at evening, shall see God in a little child and a whole religion in a brooding bird.

A NEGLECTED EPIC

SUDDENLY we have found that there is no longer any Frontier. The westward-moving course of empire has at last crossed the Pacific Ocean. Civilization has circled the globe and has come back to its starting point, the vague and mysterious East.

The thing has not been accomplished peacefully. From the very first it has been an affair of wars—of invasions. Invasions of the East by the West, and of raids North and South—raids accomplished by flying columns that dashed out from both sides of the main army. Sometimes even the invaders have fought among themselves, as, for instance, the Trojan War, or the civil wars of Italy, England, and America; sometimes they have turned back on their tracks and, upon one pretext or another, reconquered the races behind them, as, for instance, Alexander's wars to the eastward, the Crusades, and Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns.

Retarded by all these obstacles, the march has been painfully slow. To move from Egypt to Greece took centuries of time. More centuries were consumed in the campaign that brought empire from Greece to Rome, and still more centuries passed before it crossed the Alps and invaded northern and western Europe.

But observe. Once across the Mississippi, the West—our Far West—was conquered in about forty years. In all the vast campaign from east to west here is the most signal victory, the swiftest, the completest, the most brilliant achievement—the wilderness subdued at a single stroke.

Now all these various fightings to the westward, these mysterious race-movements, migrations, wars and wanderings have produced their literature, distinctive, peculiar, excellent. And this literature we call epic. The Trojan War gave us the "Iliad," the "Odyssey," and the "Æneid"; the campaign of the Greeks in Asia Minor produced the "Anabasis"; a whole cycle of literature grew from the conquest of Europe after the fall of Rome—"The Song of Roland," "The Nibelungenlied," "The Romance of the Rose," "Beowulf," "Magnusson," "The Scotch Border Ballads," "The

Poem of the Cid," "The Heimskringla," "Orlando Furioso," "Jerusalem Delivered," and the like.

On this side of the Atlantic, in his clumsy, artificial way, but yet recognized as a producer of literature, Cooper has tried to chronicle the conquest of the eastern part of our country. Absurd he may be in his ideas of life and character, the art in him veneered over with charlatanism; yet the man was solemn enough and took his work seriously, and his work is literature.

Also a cycle of romance has grown up around the Civil War. The theme has had its poets to whom the public have been glad to listen. The subject is vast, noble; is, in a word, epic, just as the Trojan War and the Retreat of the Ten Thousand were epic.

But when at last one comes to look for the literature that sprang from and has grown up around the last great epic event in the history of civilization, the event which in spite of stupendous difficulties was consummated more swiftly, more completely, more satisfactorily than any like event since the westward migration began—I mean the conquering of the West, the subduing of the wilderness beyond the Mississippi—what has this produced in the way of literature? The dime novel! The dime novel and nothing else. The dime novel and nothing better.

The Trojan War left to posterity the character of Hector; the wars with the Saracens gave us Roland; the folklore of Iceland produced Grettir; the Scotch border poetry brought forth the Douglas; the Spanish epic the Cid. But the American epic, just as heroic, just as elemental, just as important and as picturesque, will fade into history, leaving behind no finer type, no nobler hero than Buffalo Bill.

The young Greeks sat on marble terraces overlooking the Ægean Sea and listened to the thunderous roll of Homer's hexameter. In the feudal castles the minstrel sang to the young boys of Roland. The farm folk of Iceland to this very day treasure up and read to their little ones hand-written copies of the Gretla Saga chronicling the deeds and death of Grettir the Strong. But the youth of the United States learn of their epic by paying a dollar to see the "Wild West Show."

The plain truth of the matter is that we have neglected our epic —the black shame of it be on us—and no contemporaneous poet or chronicler thought it worth his while to sing the song or tell the tale of the West because literature in the day when the West was being won was a cult indulged in by certain well-bred gentlemen

in New England who looked eastward to the Old World, to the legends of England and Norway and Germany and Italy for their inspiration, and left the great, strong, honest, fearless, resolute deeds of their own countrymen to be defamed and defaced by the nameless hacks of the "yellow back" libraries.

One man—who wrote "How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar"—one poet, one chronicler did, in fact, arise for the moment, who understood that wild, brave life and who for a time gave promise of bearing record of things seen.

One of the requirements of an epic—a true epic—is that its action must devolve upon some great national event. There was no lack of such in those fierce years after '49. Just that long and terrible journey from the Mississippi to the ocean is an epic in itself. Yet no serious attempt has ever been made by an American author to render into prose or verse this event in our history as "national" in scope, in origin and in results as the Revolution itself. The prairie schooner is as large a figure in the legends as the black ship that bore Ulysses homeward from Troy. The sea meant as much to the Argonauts of the fifties as it did to the Ten Thousand.

And the Alamo! There is a trumpet-call in the word; and only the look of it on the printed page is a flash of fire. But the very histories slight the deed, and to many an American, born under the same flag that the Mexican rifles shot to ribbons on that splendid day, the word is meaningless. Yet Thermopylæ was less glorious, and in comparison with that siege the investment of Troy was mere wanton riot. At the very least the Texans in that battered adobe church fought for the honor of their flag and the greater glory of their country, not for loot or the possession of the person of an adulteress. Young men are taught to consider the "Iliad," with its butcheries, its glorification of inordinate selfishness and vanity, as a classic. Achilles, murderer, egoist, ruffian, and liar, is a hero. But the name of Bowie, the name of the man who gave his life to his flag at the Alamo, is perpetuated only in the designation of a knife. Crockett is the hero only of a "funny story" about a sagacious coon; while Travis, the boy commander who did what Gordon with an empire back of him failed to do, is quietly and definitely ignored.

Because we have done nothing to get at the truth about the West; because our best writers have turned to the old-country folklore and legends for their inspiration; because "melancholy harlequins" strut in fringed leggings upon the street-corners, one hand

held out for pennies, we have come to believe that our West, our epic, was an affair of Indians, road-agents, and desperadoes, and have taken no account of the brave men who stood for law and justice and liberty, and for those great ideas died by the hundreds, unknown and unsung—died that the West might be subdued, that the last stage of the march should be accomplished, that the Anglo-Saxon should fulfil his destiny and complete the cycle of the world.

The great figure of our neglected epic, the Hector of our ignored Iliad, is not, as the dime novels would have us believe, a lawbreaker, but a lawmaker; a fighter, it is true, as is always the case with epic figures, but a fighter for peace, a calm, grave, strong man who hated the lawbreaker as the hound hates the wolf.

He did not lounge in barrooms; he did not cheat at cards; he did not drink himself to maudlin fury; he did not "shoot at the drop of the hat." But he loved his horse, he loved his friend, he was kind to little children; he was always ready to side with the weak against the strong, with the poor against the rich. For hypocrisy and pretence, for shams and subterfuges, he had no mercy, no tolerance. He was too brave to lie and too strong to steal. The odds in that lawless day were ever against him; his enemies were many and his friends were few; but his face was always set bravely against evil, and fear was not in him even at the end. For such a man as this could die no quiet death in a land where law went no further than the statute books and life lay in the crook of my neighbor's forefinger.

He died in defence of an ideal, an epic hero, a legendary figure, formidable, sad. He died facing down injustice, dishonesty, and crime; died "in his boots"; and the same world that has glorified Achilles and forgotten Travis finds none too poor to do him reverence. No literature has sprung up around him—this great character native to America. He is of all the world-types the one distinctive to us—peculiar, particular and unique. He is dead and even his work is misinterpreted and misunderstood. His very memory will soon be gone, and the American epic, which, on the shelves of posterity, should have stood shoulder to shoulder with the "Heimskringla" and the "Tales of the Nibelungen" and the "Song of Roland," will never be written.

THE FRONTIER GONE AT LAST

Until the day when the first United States marine landed in China we had always imagined that out yonder somewhere in the West was the borderland where civilization disintegrated and merged into the untamed. Our skirmish-line was there, our posts that scouted and scrimmaged with the wilderness, a thousand miles in advance of the steady march of civilization.

And the Frontier has become so much an integral part of our conception of things that it will be long before we shall all understand that it is gone. We liked the Frontier; it was romance, the place of the poetry of the Great March, the firing-line where there was action and fighting, and where men held each other's lives in the crook of the forefinger. Those who had gone out came back with tremendous tales, and those that stayed behind made up other and even more tremendous tales.

When we—we Anglo-Saxons—busked ourselves for the first stage of the march, we began from that little historic reach of ground in the midst of the Friesland swamps, and we set our faces Westward, feeling no doubt the push of the Slav behind us. Then the Frontier was Britain and the sober peacefulness of land where are the ordered, cultivated English farmyards of to-day was the Wild West of the Frisians of that century; and for the little children of the Frisian peat cottages Hengist was the Apache Kid and Horsa Deadwood Dick—freebooters, law-defiers, slayers of men, epic heroes, blood brothers, if you please, of Boone and Bowie.

Then for centuries we halted and the van closed up with the firing-line, and we filled all England and all Europe with our clamor because for a while we seemed to have gone as far Westward as it was possible; and the checked energy of the race reacted upon itself, rebounded as it were, and back we went to the Eastward again —crusading, girding at the Mahommedan, conquering his cities, breaking into his fortresses with mangonel, siege-engine and catapult—just as the boy shut indoors finds his scope circumscribed and fills the whole place with the racket of his activity.

But always, if you will recall it, we had a curious feeling that we had not reached the ultimate West even yet, and there was still a Frontier. Always that strange sixth sense turned our heads toward the sunset; and all through the Middle Ages we were peeking and prying into the Western horizon, trying to reach it, to run it down, and the queer tales about Vineland and that storm-driven Viking's ship would not down.

And then at last a naked savage on the shores of a little island in what is now our West Indies, looking Eastward one morning, saw the caravels, and on that day the Frontier was rediscovered, and promptly a hundred thousand of the more hardy rushed to the skirmish-line and went at the wilderness as only the Anglo-Saxon can.

And then the skirmish-line decided that it would declare itself independent of the main army behind and form an advance column of its own, a separate army corps; and no sooner was this done than again the scouts went forward, went Westward, pushing the Frontier ahead of them, scrimmaging with the wilderness, blazing the way. At last they forced the Frontier over the Sierra Nevada down to the edge of the Pacific. And here it would have been supposed that the Great March would have halted again as it did before the Atlantic, that here at last the Frontier ended.

But on the first of May, 1898, a gun was fired in the Bay of Manila, still further Westward, and in response the skirmish-line crossed the Pacific, still pushing the Frontier before it. Then came a cry for help from Legation Street in Peking, and as the first boat bearing its contingent of American marines took ground on the Asian shore, the Frontier—at last after so many centuries, after so many marches, after so much fighting, so much spilled blood, so much spent treasure—dwindled down and vanished; for the Anglo-Saxon in his course of empire had circled the globe and brought the new civilization to the old civilization, and reached the starting-point of history, the place from which the migrations began. So soon as the marines landed there was no longer any West, and the equation of the horizon, the problem of the centuries for the Anglo-Saxon, was solved.

So, lament it though we may, the Frontier is gone, an idiosyncrasy that has been with us for thousands of years, the one peculiar picturesqueness of our life, is no more. We may keep alive for many years the idea of a Wild West, but the hired cowboys and paid rough riders of Mr. William Cody are more like "the real

thing" than can be found to-day in Arizona, New Mexico, or Idaho. Only the imitation cowboys, the college-bred fellows who "go out on a ranch," carry the revolver or wear the concho. The Frontier has become conscious of itself, acts the part for the Eastern visitor; and this self-consciousness is a sign, surer than all others, of the decadence of a type, the passing of an epoch. The Apache Kid and Deadwood Dick have gone to join Hengist and Horsa and the heroes of the Magnusson Saga.

But observe. What happened in the Middle Ages when for a while we could find no Western Frontier? The race impulse was irresistible. March we must, conquer we must, and checked in the Westward course of empire, we turned Eastward and expended the resistless energy that by blood was ours in conquering the Old World behind us.

To-day we are the same race, with the same impulse, the same power and, because there is no longer a Frontier to absorb our overplus of energy, because there is no longer a wilderness to conquer and because we still must march, still must conquer, we remember the old days when our ancestors before us found the outlet for their activity checked and, rebounding, turned their faces Eastward, and went down to invade the Old World. So we. No sooner have we found that our path to the Westward has ended than, reacting Eastward, we are at the Old World again, marching against it, invading it, devoting our overplus of energy to its subjugation.

But though we are the same race, with the same impulses, the same blood-instincts as the old Frisian marsh people, we are now come into a changed time and the great word of our century is no longer War, but Trade.

Or, if you choose, it is only a different word for the same race characteristic. The desire for conquest—say what you will—was as big in the breast of the most fervid of the Crusaders as it is this very day in the most peacefully disposed of American manufacturers. Had the Lion-Hearted Richard lived to-day he would have become a "leading representative of the Amalgamated Steel Companies," and doubt not for one moment that he would have underbid his Manchester rivals in the matter of bridge girders. Had Mr. Andrew Carnegie been alive at the time of the preachings of Peter the Hermit he would have raised a company of *gens d'armes* sooner than all of his brothers-in-arms, would have equipped his men better and more effectively, would have been first on the ground

before Jerusalem, would have built the most ingenious siege-engine and have hurled the first cask of Greek fire over the walls

Competition and conquest are words easily interchangeable, and the whole spirit of our present commercial crusade to the Eastward betrays itself in the fact that we can not speak of it but in terms borrowed from the glossary of the warrior. It is a commercial "invasion," a trade "war," a "threatened attack" on the part of America; business is "captured," opportunities are "seized," certain industries are "killed," certain former monopolies are "wrested away." Seven hundred years ago a certain Count Baldwin, a great leader in the attack of the Anglo-Saxon Crusaders upon the Old World, built himself a siege-engine which would help him enter the beleaguered city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is beleaguered again today, and the hosts of the Anglo-Saxon commercial crusaders are knocking at the gates. And now a company named for another Baldwin—and, for all we know, a descendant of the Count—leaders of the invaders of the Old World, advance upon the city, and, to help in the assault, build an engine—only now the engine is no longer called a *mangonel*, but a locomotive.

The difference is hardly of kind and scarcely of degree. It is a mere matter of names, and the ghost of Saladin watching the present engagement might easily fancy the old days back again.

So perhaps we have not lost the Frontier, after all. A new phrase, reversing that of Berkeley's, is appropriate to the effect that "Eastward the course of commerce takes its way," and we must look for the lost battle-line not toward the sunset, but toward the East. And so rapid has been the retrograde movement that we must go far to find it, that scattered firing-line, where the little skirmishes are heralding the approach of the Great March. We must already go further afield than England. The main body, even to the reserves, are intrenched there long since, and even continental Europe is to the rear of the skirmishers.

Along about Suez we begin to catch up with them where they are deepening the great canal, and we can assure ourselves that we are fairly abreast of the most distant line of scouts only when we come to Khiva, to Samarcand, to Bokhara, and the Trans-Baikal country.

Just now one hears much of the "American commercial invasion of England." But adjust the field-glasses and look beyond Britain and search for the blaze that the scouts have left on the telegraph poles and mile-posts of Hungary, Turkey, Turkey in Asia, Persia,

Baluchistan, India, and Siam. You'll find the blaze distinct and the road, though rough hewn, is easy to follow. Prophecy and presumption be far from us, but it would be against all precedent that the Grand March should rest forever upon its arms and its laurels along the Thames, the Mersey, and the Clyde, while its pioneers and frontiersmen are making roads for it to the Eastward.

Is it too huge a conception, too inordinate an idea, to say that the American conquest of England is but an incident of the Greater Invasion, an affair of outposts preparatory to the real manœuvre that shall embrace Europe, Asia, the whole of the Old World? Why not? And the blaze is ahead of us, and every now and then from far off there in the countries that are under the rising sun we catch the faint sounds of the skirmishing of our outposts. One of two things invariably happens under such circumstances as these: either the outposts fall back upon the main body or the main body moves up to the support of its outposts. One does not think that the outposts will fall back.

And so goes the great movement, Westward, then Eastward, forward and then back. The motion of the natural forces, the elemental energies, somehow appear to be thus alternative—action first, then reaction. The tides ebb and flow again, the seasons have their slow vibrations, touching extremes at periodic intervals. Not impossibly, in the larger view, is the analogy applicable to the movements of the races. First Westward with the great migrations, now Eastward with the course of commerce, moving in a colossal arc measured only by the hemispheres, as though upon the equator a giant dial hand oscillated, in gradual divisions through the centuries, now marking off the Westward progress, now traveling proportionately to the reaction toward the East.

Races must follow their destiny blindly, but is it not possible that we can find in this great destiny of ours something a little better than mere battle and conquest, something a little more generous than mere trading and underbidding? Inevitably with constant change of environment comes the larger view, the more tolerant spirit, and every race movement, from the first step beyond the Friesland swamp to the adjustment of the first American theodolite on the Himalayan watershed, is an unconscious lesson in patriotism. Just now we can not get beyond the self-laudatory mood, but is it not possible to hope that, as the progress develops, a new

patriotism, one that shall include all peoples, may prevail? The past would indicate that this is a goal toward which we trend.

In the end let us take the larger view, ignoring the Frieslanders, the Anglo-Saxons, the Americans. Let us look at the peoples as people and observe how inevitably as they answer the great Westward impulse the true patriotism develops. If we can see that it is so with all of them we can assume that it must be so with us, and may know that mere victory in battle as we march Westward, or mere supremacy in trade as we react to the East, is not after all the great achievement of the races, but patriotism. Not our present day selfish conception of the word, but a new patriotism, whose meaning is now the secret of the coming centuries.

Consider then the beginnings of patriotism. At the very first, the seed of the future nation was the regard of family; the ties of common birth held men together, and the first feeling of patriotism was the love of family. But the family grows, develops by lateral branches, expands and becomes the clan. Patriotism is the devotion to the clan, and the clansmen will fight and die for its supremacy.

Then comes the time when the clans, tired of the roving life of herders, halt a moment and settle down in a chosen spot; the tent, becoming permanent, evolves the dwelling-house, and the encampment of the clan becomes at last a city. Patriotism now is civic pride; the clan absorbed into a multitude of clans is forgotten; men speak of themselves as Athenians, not as Greeks, as Romans, not as Italians. It is the age of cities.

The city extends its adjoining grazing fields; they include outlying towns, other cities, and finally the State comes into being. Patriotism no longer confines itself to the walls of the city, but is enlarged to encompass the entire province. Men are Hanoverians or Wurtemburgers, not Germans; Scots or Welsh, not English; are even Carolinians or Alabamans rather than Americans.

But the States are federated, pronounced boundaries fade, State makes common cause with State, and at last the nation is born. Patriotism at once is a national affair, a far larger, broader, truer sentiment than that first huddling about the hearthstone of the family. The word "brother" may be applied to men unseen and unknown, and a countryman is one of many millions.

We have reached this stage at the present, but if all signs are true, if all precedent may be followed, if all augury may be relied

on and the tree grow as we see the twig is bent, the progress will not stop here.

By war to the Westward the family fought its way upward to the dignity of the nation; by reaction Eastward the nation may in patriotic effect merge with other nations, and others and still others, peacefully, the bitterness of trade competition may be lost, the business of the nations seen as a friendly *quid pro quo,* give and take arrangement, guided by a generous reciprocity. Every century the boundaries are widening, patriotism widens with the expansion, and our countrymen are those of different race, even different nations.

Will it not go on, this epic of civilization, this destiny of the races, until at last and at the ultimate end of all we who now arrogantly boast ourselves as Americans, supreme in conquest, whether of battleship or of bridge-building, may realize that the true patriotism is the brotherhood of man and know that the whole world is our nation and simple humanity our countrymen?

THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVELIST

Of all the overworked phrases of overworked book reviewers, the phrase, the "Great American Novelist," is beyond doubt worn the thinnest from much handling—or mishandling. Continually the little literary middlemen who come between the producers and the consumers of fiction are mouthing the words with a great flourish of adjectives, scare-heading them in Sunday supplements or placarding them on posters, crying out, "Lo, he is here!" or "lo, there!" But the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing. The G. A. N. is either as extinct as the dodo or as far in the future as the practical aeroplane. He certainly is not discoverable at the present.

The moment a new writer of fiction begins to make himself felt he is gibbeted upon this elevation—upon this *false*, insecure elevation, for the underpinning is of the flimsiest, and at any moment is liable to collapse under the victim's feet and leave him hanging in midair by head and hands, a fixture and a mockery.

And who is to settle the title upon the aspirant in the last issue? Who is to determine what constitutes the G. A. N.? Your candidate may suit *you*, but your neighbor may have a very different standard to which he must conform. It all depends upon what you mean by *Great*, what you mean by *American*. Shakespeare has been called great and so has Mr. Stephen Phillips. Oliver Wendell Holmes was *American*, and so is Bret Harte. Who is to say?

And many good people who deplore the decay of American letters are accustomed to refer to the absence of a G. A. N. as though there were a Great English Novelist or a Great French Novelist. But do these two people exist? Ask any dozen of your friends to mention the Great English Novelist, and out of the dozen you will get at least a half-dozen different names. It will be Dickens or Scott or Thackeray or Brontë or Eliot or Stevenson, and the same with the Frenchman. And it seems to me that if a novelist were great enough to be universally acknowledged to be the Great one of his country, he would cease to belong to any particular geographical area and would become a heritage of the whole world; as, for

instance, Tolstoi; when one thinks of him it is—is it not?—as a novelist first and as a Russian afterward.

But if one wishes to split hairs, one might admit that while the Great American Novelist is yet to be born, the possibility of *A*—note the indefinite article—*A* Great American Novel is not too remote for discussion. But such a novel will be sectional. The United States is a Union, but not a unit, and the life of one part is very, very different from the life in another. It is as yet impossible to construct a novel which will represent all the various characteristics of the different sections. It is only possible to make a picture of a single locality. What is true of the South is not true of the North. The West is different, and the Pacific Coast is a community by itself.

Many of our very best writers are working on this theory. Bret Harte made a study of the West as he saw it, and Mr. Howells has done the same for the East. Cable has worked the field of the Far South, and Eggleston has gone deep into the life of the Middle West.

But consider a suggestion. It is an argument on the other side, and to be fair one must present it. It is a good argument, and if based on fact is encouraging in the hope that the *Great* man may yet appear. It has been said that "what is true—vitally and inherently true—for any one man is true for all men." Accordingly, then, what is vitally true of the Westerner is true of the Bostonian—yes, and of the creole. So that if Mr. Cable, say, should only go *deep enough* into the hearts and lives of his creoles, he would at last strike the universal substratum and find the elemental thing that is common to the creole and to the Puritan alike—yes, and to the Cowboy and Hoosier and Greaser and Buckeye and Jay Hawker, and that, once getting hold of *that,* he could produce the Great American Novel that should be a picture of the entire nation.

Now, that is a very ingenious argument and sounds very plausible. But it won't do, and for this reason: If an American novelist should go so deep into the lives of the people of any one community that he would find the thing that is common to another class of people a thousand miles away, he would have gone *too* deep to be exclusively American. He would not only be American, but English as well. He would have sounded the world-note; he would be a writer not national, but international, and his countrymen would be all humanity, not the citizens of any one nation. He himself would

be a heritage of the whole world, a second Tolstoi, which brings us back to the very place from which we started.

And the conclusion of the whole matter? That fiction is very good or very bad—there is no middle ground; that writers of fiction in their points of view are either limited to a circumscribed area or see humanity as a tremendous conglomerate whole; that it must be either Mary Wilkins or George Eliot, Edward Eggleston or William Shakespeare; that the others do not weigh very much in the balance of the world's judgment; and that the Great American Novel is not extinct like the dodo, but mythical like the hippogriff, and that the thing to be looked for is not the Great American Novelist, but the Great Novelist who shall also be an American.

NEW YORK AS A LITERARY CENTRE

It has been given to the present writer to know a great many of what one may call The Unarrived in literary work, and of course to be one himself of that "innumerable caravan," and speaking authoritatively and of certain knowledge, the statement may be made that of all the ambitions of the Great Unpublished, the one that is strongest, the most abiding, is the ambition to get to New York. For these, New York is the "point de depart," the pedestal, the niche, the indispensable vantage ground; as one of the unpublished used to put it: "It is a place that I can stand on and holler."

This man lived in a second-class town west of the Mississippi, and one never could persuade him that he might holler from his own, his native heath, and yet be heard. He said it would be "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." New York was the place for him. Once land him in New York and all would be gas and gaiters.

There are so many thousands like this young man of mine that a word in this connection seems appropriate; and the object of this present writing is to protest against this blind and unreasoned hegira, and to urge the point that, tradition precedent to the contrary notwithstanding, New York is not a literary centre.

I am perfectly well aware that this statement savors of heresy, but at the same time I think it can be defended. As for instance:

Time was when Boston claimed the distinction that one now denies to New York. But one asserts that Boston made her claims good. In those days the reactionary movement of populations from the cities toward the country had not set in. A constant residence winter and summer in the country was not dreamed of by those who had the leisure and the money to afford it. As much as possible the New England writers crowded to Boston, or to Cambridge, which is practically the same thing, and took root in the place. There was their local habitation; there they lived, and thence they spread their influence. Remember that at the height of the development of the New England school there were practically

no other writers of so great importance the length and breadth of the land. This huddling about a common point made it possible to visit all the homes of nearly all of the most eminent American literati in a single day. The younger men, the aspirants, the Unpublished, however, thrown into such society, could not fail to be tremendously impressed, and, banded together as these great ones were, their influence counted enormously. It was no unusual sight to see half a dozen of these at the same dinner table. They all knew each other intimately, these Bostonians, and their word was *Lex,* and the neophites came from all corners of the compass to hear them speak, and Boston did in good earnest become the Hub, the centre of Literary thought and work in the United States.

But no such conditions obtain in New York to-day. During the last ten years two very important things have happened that bear upon this question. First has come the impulse toward a country life—a continued winter and summer residence in the country. Authors more than any other class of workers can afford this, since their profession can be carried anywhere. They need no city offices. They are not forced to be in touch with the actual business life of Broadway. Secondly, since the days of the Bostonian supremacy a tremendous wave of literary production has swept over the United States. New England has ceased to be the only place where books are written. Poems are now indited in Dakota, novels composed in Wyoming, essays written in Utah, and criticisms flourish in Kansas. A thousand and one Little Centres have sprung up. Literary groups are formed everywhere, in Buffalo, in San Francisco, in Indianapolis and Chicago.

All this detracts from the preponderance of any one city, such as New York, as Literary dictator. You shall find but a very small and meagre minority of the Greater Men of Letters who have their homes in Manhattan. Most of them prefer to live in the places whereof they treat in their books, in New Orleans, in Indiana, in Kentucky, or Virginia, or California, or Kansas, or Illinois. If they come to New York at all it is only temporarily, to place their newest book or to arrange with publishers for future work.

The result of this is as is claimed. New York is not a literary centre. The publishing houses are there, the magazines, all the distributing machinery; but not the writers. They do not live there. They do not care to come there. They regard the place simply as a distributing point for their wares.

Literary centres produce literary men. Paris, London, and

Boston all have their long lists of native-born writers—men who were born in these cities and whose work was identified with them. But New York can claim but ridiculously few of the men of larger calibre as her own. James Whitcomb Riley is from Indiana. Joel Chandler Harris is a Southerner. Howells came from Boston, Cable from New Orleans, Hamlin Garland from the West, Bret Harte from California, Mark Twain from the Middle West. Harold Frederic and Henry James found England more congenial than the greatest cities of their native land. Even among the younger generation there are but few who can be considered as New Yorkers. Although Richard Harding Davis wrote accurately and delightfully of New York people, he was not born in New York, did not receive his first impetus from New York influences, and does not now live in New York. Nor is his best work upon themes or subjects in any way related to New York.

In view of all these facts it is difficult to see what the Great Unpublished have to gain by a New York residence. Indeed, it is much easier to see how very much they have to lose.

The writing of fiction has many drawbacks, but one of its blessed compensations is the fact that of all the arts it is the most independent—independent of time, of manner, and of place. Wherever there is a table and quiet, there the novel may be written. "Ah, but the publishing houses are in New York!" What has that to do with it? Do not for a moment suppose that your novel will be considered more carefully because you submit it in person. It is not as though you were on the lookout for odd jobs which, because of a personal acquaintance with editors and publishers, might be put in your way. The article, the story, the essay, poem or novel is just as good, just as available, just as salable whether it comes from Washington Territory or Washington Square.

Not only this, but one believes that actual residence in New York is hostile and inimical to good work. The place, admittedly, teems with literary clubs, circles, associations, organizations of pseudo-literati, who foregather at specified times to "read papers" and "discuss questions." It is almost impossible for the young writer who comes for a first time to the city to avoid entangling himself with them; and of the influences that tend to stultify ambition, warp original talent, and definably and irretrievably stamp out the last spark of productive ability one knows of none more effective than the literary clubs.

You will never find the best men at these gatherings. You will

never hear the best work read in this company, you will never evolve any original, personal, definite ideas or ideals under such influence. The discussions of the literary clubs are made up of puerile arguments that have done duty for years in the college text-books. Their work—the papers quoted and stories read aloud—is commonplace and conventional to the deadliest degree, while their "originality"—the ideas that they claim are their very own—is nothing but a distortion and dislocation of preconceived notions, mere bizarre effects of the grotesque and the improbable. "Ah, but the spur of competition." Competition is admirable in trade—it is even desirable in certain arts. It has no place in a literary career. It is not as though two or more writers were working on the same story, each striving to better the others. That would, indeed, be true competition. But in New York, where the young writer—any writer—may see a dozen instances in a week of what he knows is inferior work succeeding where he fails, competition is robbed of all stimulating effect and, if one is not very careful, leaves only the taste of ashes in the mouth and rancor and discontent in the heart.

With other men's novels the novelist has little to do. What this writer is doing, what that one is saying, what books this publishing house is handling, how many copies of so-and-so's book are selling—all this fuss and feathers of "New York as a literary centre" should be for him so many distractions. It is all very well to say, "Let us keep in touch with the best thought in our line of work." "Let us be in the movement." The best thought is not in New York; and even if it were, the best thought of other men is not so good for you as your own thought, dug out of your own vitals by your own unaided efforts, be it never so inadequate.

You do not have to go to New York for that. Your own ideas, your own work will flourish best if left alone untrammeled and uninfluenced. And believe this to be true, that wherever there is a table, a sheet of paper and a pot of ink, there is a Literary Centre if you will. You will find none better the world over.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND "POPULAR" FICTION

The American people judged by Old World standards—even sometimes according to native American standards—have always been considered a practical people, a material people.

We have been told and have also told ourselves that we are hard-headed, that we rejoiced in facts and not in fancies, and as an effect of this characteristic were not given to books. We were not literary, we assumed, were not fond of reading. We, who were subjugating a continent, who were inventing machinery and building railroads, left it to the older and more leisurely nations—to France and to England—to read books.

On the face of it this would seem a safe assumption. As a matter of fact, the American people are the greatest readers in the world. That is to say, that, count for count, there are more books read in the United States in one year than in any other country of the globe in the same space of time.

Nowhere do the circulations attain such magnitude as they do with us. A little while ago—ten years ago—the charge that we did not read was probably true. But there must exist some mysterious fundamental connection between this recent sudden expansion of things American—geographic, commercial, and otherwise—and the demand for books. Imperialism, Trade Expansion, the New Prosperity and the Half Million Circulation all came into existence at about the same time.

Merely the fact of great prosperity does not account for the wider reading. Prosperous periods, good prices, easy credit and a mobile currency have occurred often before without producing the demand for books. Something more than prosperity has suddenly swept across the continent and evaded the spirit of the times. Something very like an awakening, something very like a renaissance and the 70,000,000 have all at once awakened to the fact that there are books to be read. As with all things sudden, there is noticeable with this awakening a lack of discrimination, the 70,000,000

are so eager for books that, *faute de mieux,* anything printed will pass current for literature. It is a great animal, this American public, and having starved for so long, it is ready, once aroused, to devour anything. And the great presses of the country are for the most part merely sublimated sausage machines that go dashing along in a mess of paper and printer's ink turning out the meat for the monster.

There are not found wanting many who deplore this and who blackguard the great brute for his appetite. Softly, softly. If the Megatherium had been obliged to swallow wind for sustenance for several hundred years, it would be unkind to abuse him because he eats the first lot of spoiled hay or overripe twigs that is thrust under the snout of him. Patience and shuffle the cards. Once his belly filled, and the pachyderm will turn to the new-mown grass and fruit trees in preference to the hay and twigs.

So the studios and the Browning classes need not altogether revile the great American public. Better bad books than no books; better half a loaf of hard bread than *no* frosted wedding-cake. The American people, unlike the English, unlike the French and other Europeans, have not been educated and refined and endoctrinated for 2,000 years, and when you remember what they have done in *one hundred* years, tamed an entire continent, liberated a race, produced a Lincoln, invented the telegraph, spanned the plains—when you remember all this, do not spurn the 70,000,000 because they do not understand Henry James, but be glad that they even care for "The Duchess" and "Ouida." The wonder of it is not that they do not read or appreciate the best, but that they have set apart any time at all in the struggle of civilizing the wilderness and forging steel rivets to so much as pick up any kind or description of a book.

Consider the other nations, France for instance—the very sanctum of Art, the home and birthplace of literature. Compare the rural districts of France with the rural districts of the United States, and in the comparison allow, if you like, for all the centuries of quiet, uninterrupted growth, the wilderness tamed, life domesticated, reduced to routine, that modern France enjoys. Do you suppose for one moment that a bourgeois family of—say—Tours is on the same level in the matter of its reading as the household of a contractor's family in—for example—Martinez, California, or Cheyenne, Wyoming?

I tell you there is no comparison whatever. The West may be

wild even yet, may be what Boston would call uncultured, but it *reads*. There are people in Cheyenne and Martinez who can express an opinion—and a more intelligent opinion, mark you—on Maeterlinck and Bourget, better than the same class of readers in Belgium and France. And quite as likely as not the same class of people in the very native countries of the two writers named have never so much as heard of these writers.

This, admittedly, is the exception, but if our exceptional Martinez and Cheyenne people are so far advanced in literary criticism, we may reasonably expect that the rank and file below them are proportionately well on. Maeterlinck and Bourget are closed books to those rank-and-file readers yet. But again I say, this is not the point. The point is, that they are readers at all. Let them—in the name of future American literature—read their Duchesses and Ouidas and Edna Lyalls and Albert Rosses. What are their prototypes in France, Germany, and Russia reading? They simply are not reading at all, and as often as not it is not because of the lack of taste, but because of the lack of sheer downright ability, because they do not know how to read.

A very great man once said that "books never have done harm," and under this sign let us conquer. There is hardly a better to be found. Instead, then, of deploring the vast circulation of mediocre novels, let us take the larger view and find in the fact not a weakness, but a veritable strength. The more one reads—it is a curious consolatory fact—the more one is apt to discriminate. The ten-year-old who reads "Old Sleuth" to-day, in a little while will find Scott more to his liking. Just now the 70,000,000 is ten years old. But it is started right. Patience. Books have never done harm, and in the end let us be certain that the day will come when the real masterpiece, the real literature, will also be selling in its "five hundredth thousand."

CHILD STORIES FOR ADULTS

THERE was a time, none too remote at this date of writing, when juvenile and adult fiction were two separate and distinct classifications. Boys read stories for boys and girls stories for girls, and the adults contented themselves with the wise lucubrations of their equals in years. But the last few years have changed all that—have changed everything in American literature, in fact.

Some far-distant day, when the critics and *litterateurs* of the twenty-second and twenty-third centuries shall be writing of our day and age, they will find a name for the sudden and stupendous demand for reading matter that has penetrated to all classes and corners since 1890. A great deal could be said upon this sudden demand in itself, and I think it can be proved to be the first effects of a genuine awakening—a second Renaissance. But the subject would demand an article by itself, and in the meanwhile we may use the term awakening as a self-evident fact and consider not so much the cause as the effects.

One of the effects, as has been already suggested, is the change in classifications. Old forms and formulas are being rapidly broken up, one school and style merging into others, till now what was once amusement for the children has become entertaining for the elders. And vice versa. The abruptness of the awakening has disjointed and inverted all the old fabric. "Robinson Crusoe," written for adults, is now exclusively a "juvenile," while "Treasure Island," written for boys, has been snapped up by the parents.

Simultaneously with this topsy-turvy business, and I am sure in some way connected with it, comes the craze for stories about very young children for adult reading. A boy's story must now be all about the doings of men, fighters preferably, man-slayers, terrible fellows full of blood and fury, stamping on their quarter-decks or counting doubloons by torchlight on unnamed beaches. Meanwhile the boy's father with a solemn interest is following the fortunes of some terrible infant of the kindergarten, or the vagaries of a ten-year-old of a country town, or the teacup tragedy of "The

Very Little Girl," or "The Indiscretion of Pinky Trevethan," or "The Chastening of Skinny McCleave," etc., etc.

It is interesting to try to account for this. It may either be a fad or a phase. It is almost too soon to tell, but in either case the matter is worth considering.

Roughly speaking, the Child's Stories for Adults fall into three classes. First there is "The Strange Child Story." This is a very old favorite, and was pretty well-installed long before the more recent developments. In "The Strange Child Story" the bid for the reader's pity and sympathy fairly clamored from between the lines. Always and persistently The Strange Child was misunderstood. He had "indefinable longings" that were ridiculed, budding talents that were nipped, heartaches—terrible, tear-compelling heartaches—that were ignored; and he lived in an atmosphere of gloom, hostility and loneliness that would have maddened an eremite.

But as his kind declined in popular estimate the country boy, the ten-year-old—who always went in swimmin' and lost his tow—appeared in the magazines. There is no sentiment about him. Never a tear need be shed over the vicarious atonements of Pinky Trevethan or Skinny McCleave.

It is part of the game to pretend that the Pinkys and Skinnys and Peelys and Mickeys are different indivdiuals. Error. They are merely different names of the boy that perenially and persistently remains the same. Do you know who he is? He is the average American business man before he grew up. That accounts for his popularity. The average business man had clean forgotten all about those early phases of primitive growth, and it amuses him immensely to find out that the scribe has been making a study of him and bringing to light the forgotten things that are so tremendously familiar when presented to the consideration. It is not fiction nor yet literature in the straightest sense of the word, this rehabilitation of Skinny McCleave. It has a value vaguely scientific, the same value that a specimen, a fossil insect, has when brought to the attention of the savant. It is the study of an extinct species, a report upon the American boy of thirty years ago.

Then lastly—the latest development—there is the cataclysm of the kindergarten, the checked apron drama, the pigtail passion, the epic of the broken slate-pencil. This needs a delicacy of touch that only a woman can supply, and as a matter of fact it is for the most part women who sign the stories. The interest in these is not so personal and retrospective as in the Skinny McCleave circle, for the

kindergarten is too recent to be part of the childhood memories of the present generation of adult magazine readers. It is more informative, a presentation of conditions hitherto but vaguely known, and at the same time it is an attempt to get at and into the heart and head of a little child.

And in this last analysis it would seem as if here existed the barrier insurmountable. It is much to be doubted if ever a genius will arise so thoughtful, so sensitive, that he will penetrate into more than the merest outside integument of a child's heart. Certain phases have been guessed at with beautiful intuition, certain rare insights have been attained with exquisite nicety, but somehow even the most sympathetic reader must feel that the insight is as rare as the interest is misguided.

Immanuel Kant conceived of and, in the consummate power of his intellect, executed the "Critique of Pure Reason"; Darwin had taken the adult male and female human and tracked down their every emotion, impulse, quality and sentiment. The intellectual powers and heart-beats of a Napoleon or a Shakespeare have been reduced to mere commonplace corner gossip, but after thousands of years of civilization, with the subject ever before us, its workings as near to us as air itself, the mind of a little child is as much a closed book, as much an enigma, as much a blank space upon the charts of our intellectual progress as at the very first.

Volumes have been written about the child, and stories for and of the child, and very learned men have lectured and other very eminent and noble men have taught, and it has all been going on for nineteen hundred and two years. And yet, notwithstanding all this, there lurks a mystery deep down within the eye of the five-year-old, a mystery that neither you nor I may know. You may see and understand what he actually does, but the thinking part of him is a second hidden nature that belongs to him and to other children, not to adults, not even to his mother. Once the older person invades the sphere of influence of this real undernature of the child and it congeals at once. It thaws and thrives only in the company of other children, and at the best we older ones may see it from a distance and from the outside. Between us and them it would appear that a great gulf is bridged; there is no knowing the child as he really is, and until the real child can be known the stories about him and the fiction and literature about him can at best be only a substitute for the real knowledge that probably never shall be ours.

NEWSPAPER CRITICISMS AND AMERICAN FICTION

The limitations of space impose a restricted title, and one hastens to qualify the substantive "criticisms" by the adjective "average." Even "average" is not quite specialized enough; "vast majority" is more to the sense, and the proposition expanded to its fullest thus stands, "How is the vast majority of newspaper criticisms made, and how does it affect American Fiction?" And it may not be inappropriate at the outset to observe that one has adventured both hazards—criticism (of the "vast majority" kind) and also Fiction. One has criticised and has been criticised. Possibly then it may be permitted to speak a little authoritatively; not as the Scribes. Has it not astonished you how many of those things called by the new author "favorable reviews" may attach themselves—barnacles upon a lifeless hulk—to a novel that you know, that you know every one must, must know, is irretrievably bad? "On the whole, Mr. ——'s story is a capital bit of vigorous writing that we joyfully recommend"—"A thrilling story palpitating with life," "One of the very best novels that has appeared in a long time," and the ever-new, ever-dutiful, ever-ready encomium, "Not a dull page in the book" (as if by the furthest stretch of conceivable human genius a book could be written that did not have a dull page; as if dull pages were not an absolute necessity). All these you may see strung after the announcement of publication of the novel; no matter, I repeat, how outrageously bad the novel may be. Now, there is an explanation of this matter, and it is to be found not in the sincere admiration of little reviewers who lack the ingenuity to invent new phrases, but in the following fact: it is easier to write favorable than unfavorable reviews. It must be borne in mind that very few newspapers (comparatively) employ regularly paid book-reviewers whose business it is to criticise novels—and nothing else. Most book-reviewing is done as an odd job by sub-editors, assistants, and special writers in the intervals between their regular work. They come to the task with a brain already jaded, an interest so

low as to be almost negligible, and with—as often as not—a mind besieged by a thousand other cares, responsibilities, and projects.

The chief has said something like this (placing upon the scribe's table a column of novels easily four feet high, sent in for review):

"Say, B——, these things have been stacking up like the devil lately, and I don't want 'em kicking 'round the office any longer. Get through with them as quick as you can, and remember that in an hour there's such and such to be done."

I tell you I have seen it happen like this a hundred times. And the scribe "must" read and "review" between twenty and thirty books in an hour's time. One way of doing it is to search in the pages of the book for the "publisher's notice," a printed slip that has a favorable review—that is what it amounts to—all ready-made. The scribe merely turns this in with a word altered here and there. How he reviews the books that have not this publisher's notice Heaven only knows. He is not to blame, as they must be done in an hour. Twenty books in sixty minutes—three minutes to each book. Now, it is impossible to criticise a book adversely after a minute and a half of reading (we will allow a minute and a half for writing the review). In order to write unfavorably it is necessary to know what one is writing about. But it is astonishing how much commendatory palaver already exists that can be applied to any kind or condition of novel. Is it a novel of adventure (the reviewer may know if it be such by the ship on the cover design—it will be appropriate to use these terms: "Vibrant with energy," or "Full of fine fighting," or "The reader is carried with breathless interst from page to page of this exciting romance." Is it a novel of rural life? These may be made use of: "Replete with quaint humor," "A faithful picture of an interesting phase of American life," etc., etc. Is it a story of the West (you can guess that from the chapter headings), it will be proper to say, "A strong and vital portraying of the wild life of the trail and frontier."

And so one might run through the entire list. The books must be reviewed, the easiest way is the quickest, and the quickest way is to write in a mild and meaningless phraseology, innocuous, "favorable." In this fashion is made the greater mass of American criticism. As to effects: It has of course no effect upon the novel's circulation. Only one person is at all apt to take these reviews, this hack-work, seriously.

Only one person, I observed, is at all apt to take these reviews seriously—this way lies the harm—the new writer, the young fel-

low with his first book, who may not know the ways of reviewers; the author, who collects these notices and pastes them in a scrap-book. He is perilously prone to believe what the hacks say, to believe that there is "no dull page in the story," that his novel is "one of the notable contributions to recent fiction," and cherishing this belief he is fated to a wrench and a heartache when, six months after publication day, the semi-annual account of copies sold is rendered. There is unfortunately no palaver in the writing of this—no mild-mannered phraseology; and the author is made to see suddenly that "this exciting romance" which the reviewers have said the readers "would follow with a breathless interest till the end is reached and then wish for more," has circulated among—possibly—five hundred of the breathless.

Thus, then, the vast majority of criticisms. It is not all, however, and it is only fair to say that there are exceptions—great papers which devote whole supplements to the consideration of literary matters and whose reviewers are deliberate, thoughtful fellows, who do not read more than one book a week, who sign their opinions and who have themselves a name, a reputation, to make or keep. These must have an effect. But even the most conspicuous among them can not influence very widely. They may help, so one believes, a good book which is already becoming popular. No one of them can "make" a book by a "favorable review," as they could a little while ago in France. No number of them could do it, here in America. There are too many other reviewers. No one man, nor aggregation of men, can monopolize the requisite authority. And then with us the spirit of independent thinking and judgment is no doubt too prevalent.

NOVELISTS TO ORDER—WHILE YOU WAIT

Not at all absurd, "Novelists to order—while you wait," provided you order the right sort, and are willing to wait long enough. In other words, it is quite possible to make a novelist, and a good one, too, if the thing is undertaken in the right spirit, just as it is possible to make a painter, or an actor, or a business man.

I am prepared to hear the old objections raised to this: "Ah, it must be born in you"; "no amount of training can 'make' an artist"; "poets are born and not made," etc., etc. But I am also willing to contend that a very large percentage of this talk is sheer nonsense, and that what the world calls "genius" is, as often as not, the results of average ability specialized and developed. The original "spark" in the child-mind, that later on "kindles the world into flame with its light," I do believe could be proved to be the same for the artist, the actor, the novelist, the inventor, even the financier and "magnate." It is only made to burn in different lamps. Nor does any one believe that this "spark" is any mysterious, supernatural gift, some marvelous, angelic "genius," God-given, Heaven-given, etc., etc., etc., but just plain, forthright, rectangular, everyday common-sense, nothing more extraordinary or God-given than sanity. If it were true that Genius is the gift of the gods, it would also be true that hard work in cultivating it would be superfluous. As well be without genius if some plodder, some dullard, can by such work equal the best you can do—you with your God-given faculties.

Is it not much more reasonable—more noble, for the matter of that—to admit at once that all faculties, all intellects, are God-given, the only difference being that some are specialized to one end, some to another, some not specialized at all. We call Rostand and Mr. Carnegie geniuses, but most of us would be unwilling to admit that the genius of the American financier differed in kind from the genius of the French dramatist. However, one believes that this is open to debate. As for my part, I suspect that, given a difference in environment and training, Rostand would have con-

solidated the American steel companies and Carnegie have written "L'Aiglon." But one dares to go a little further—a great deal further—and claims that the young Carnegie and the young Rostand were no more than intelligent, matter-of-fact boys, in no wise different from the common house variety, grammer school product. They have been trained differently, that is all.

Given the ordinary intelligent ten-year-old, and, all things being equal, you can make anything you like out of him—a minister of the gospel or a green-goods man, an electrical engineer or a romantic poet, or—return to our muttons—a novelist. If a failure is the result, blame the method of training, not the quantity or quality of the ten-year-old's intellect. Don't say, if he is a failure as a fine novelist, that he lacks genius for writing, and would have been a fine business man. Make no mistake, if he did not have enough "genius" for novel-writing he would certainly have not had enough for business.

"Why, then," you will ask, "is it so impossible for some men, the majority of them, to write fine novels, or fine poems, or paint fine pictures? Why is it that this faculty seems to be reserved for the chosen few, the more refined, cultured, etc.? Why is it, in a word, that, for every artist (using the word to include writers, painters, actors, etc.) that appears there are thousands of business men, commercial "geniuses"?

The reason seems to lie in this: and it is again a question of training. From the very first the average intelligent American boy is trained not with a view toward an artistic career, but with a view to entering a business life. If the specialization of his faculties along artistic lines ever occurs at all it begins only when the boy is past the formative period. In other words, most people who eventually become artists are educated for the first eighteen or twenty years of their life along entirely unartistic lines. Biographies of artists are notoriously full of just such instances. The boy who is to become a business man finds, the moment he goes to school, a whole vast machinery of training made ready for his use, and not only is it a matter of education for him, but the whole scheme of modern civilization works in his behalf. No one ever heard of obstacles thrown in the way of the boy who announces for himself a money-making career; while for the artist, as is said, education, environment, the trend of civilization are not merely indifferent, but openly hostile and inimical. One hears only of those men who surmount—and at what cost to their artistic powers—

those obstacles. How many thousands are there who succumb unrecorded!

So that it has not often been tried—the experiment of making a novelist while you wait—*i. e.*, taking a ten-year-old of average intelligence and training him to be a novelist. Suppose all this modern, this gigantic perfected machinery—all this resistless trend of a commercial civilization were set in motion in favor of the little aspirant for honors in artistic fields, who is to say with such a training he would not in the end be a successful artist, painter, poet, musician, or novelist? Training, not "genius," would make him.

Then, too, another point. The artistic training should begin much, much earlier than the commercial training—instead of, as at present, so much later.

Nowadays, as a rule, the artist's training begins, as was said, after a fourth of his life, the very best, the most important, has been lived. You can take a boy of eighteen and make a business man of him in ten years. But at eighteen the faculties that make a good artist are very apt to be atrophied, hardened, unworkable. Even the ten-year-old is almost too old to begin on. The first ten years of childhood are the imaginative years, the creative years, the observant years, the years of a fresh interest in life. The child "imagines" terrors or delights, ghosts or fairies, creates a world out of his toys, and observes to an extent that adults have no idea of. ("Give me," a detective once told me, "a child's description of a man that is wanted. It beats an adult's every single time.") And imagination, creation, observation, and an unblunted interest in life are exactly the faculties most needed by novelists.

At eighteen there comes sophistication—or a pretended sophistication, which is deadlier. Other men's books take the place of imagination for the young man; creation in him is satisfied by dramas, horse-races, and amusements. The newspapers are his observation, and oh, how he assumes to be above any pleasure in simple, vigorous life!

So that at eighteen it is, as a rule, too late to make a fine novelist out of him. He may start out in that career, but he will not go fa —so far as he would in business. But if he were taken in hand a soon as he could write in words of three syllables, and instead of being crammed with commercial arithmetic (How many marbles did A have? If a man buys a piece of goods at 12½ cents and sells it for 15 cents, etc., etc.)—

If he had been taken in hand when his imagination was alive,

his creative power vigorous, his observation lynxlike, and his interest keen, and trained with a view toward the production of original fiction, who is to say how far he would have gone?

One does not claim that the artist is above the business man. Far from it. Only, when you have choked the powers of imagination and observation, and killed off the creative ability, and deadened the interest in life, don't call it lack of genius.

Nor when some man of a different race than ours, living in a more congenial civilization, whose training from his youth up has been adapted to a future artistic profession, succeeds in painting the great picture, composing the great prelude, writing the great novel, don't say he was born a "genius," but rather admit that he was made "to order" by a system whose promoters knew how to wait.

THE "NATURE" REVIVAL IN LITERATURE

It has been a decade of fads, and "the people have imagined a vain thing," as they have done from the time of Solomon and as no doubt they will till the day of the New Jerusalem. And in no other line of activity has the instability and changeableness of the taste of the public been so marked as in that of literature. Such an overturning of old gods and such a setting up of new ones, such an image-breaking, shrine-smashing, relic-ripping carnival I doubt has ever been witnessed in all the history of writing. It has been a sort of literary Declaration of Independence. For half a century certain great names, from Irving down to Holmes, were veritable *Abracadabras*—impeccable, sanctified. Then all at once the *fin-de-siècle* irreverence seemed to invade all sorts and conditions simultaneously, and the sombre, sober idols were shouldered off into the dark niches, and not a man of us that did not trundle forth his own little tin-god-on-wheels, kowtowing and making obeisance, and going before with cymbals and a great noise, proclaiming a New Great One; now it was the great Colonial Image, now the Great Romantic Image, now the Great Minor-German Kingdom Image.

There are a great many very eminent and very wise critics who frown upon and deplore the reaction. But it is a question if, after all, the movement will not prove—ultimately—beneficial. Convention, blind adherence to established forms, inertia, is the dry rot of a national literature. Better the American public should read bad books than no books, and that same public is reading now as never before. It is a veritable upheaval, a breaking-up of all the old grounds. Better this than supineness; better this than immobility. Once the ground turned over a bit, harrowed and loosened, and the place is made ready for the good seed.

Some of this, one chooses to believe, has already been implanted. In all the parade of the new little tin-gods some may be discovered that are not tin, but sterling. Of all the fads, the most legitimate, the most abiding, the most inherent—so it would appear—is the "Nature" revival. Indeed, it is not fair to call it a fad at all. For it is a return to the primitive, sane life of the country, and the

natural thing by its very character can not be artificial, can not be a "fad." The writers who have followed where Mr. Thompson Seton blazed the way are so numerous and so well known that it is almost superfluous in this place to catalogue or criticise them. But it is significant of the strength of this movement that such an outdoor book as "Bob, Son of Battle," was unsuccessful in England, and only attained its merited popularity when published here in America. We claimed the "good gray dog" as our own from the very first, recognizing that the dog has no nationality, being indeed a citizen of the whole world. The flowers in "Elizabeth's German Garden"—also world citizens—we promptly transplanted to our own soil. Mr. Mowbray, with his mingling of fact and fiction, made his country home for the benefit—I have no doubt—of hundreds who have actually worked out the idea suggested in his pages. The butterfly books, the garden books, the flower books, expensive as they are, have been in as much demand as some very popular novels. Mr. Dugmore astonished and delighted a surprisingly large public with his marvelous life-photographs of birds, while even President Roosevelt himself deemed Mr. Wallihan's "Photographs of Big Game" of so much importance and value that he wrote the introductory notice to that excellent volume.

It is hardly possible to pick up a magazine now that does not contain the story of some animal hero. Time was when we relegated this sort to the juvenile periodicals. But now we can not get too much of it. Wolves, rabbits, hounds, foxes, the birds, even the reptilia, all are dramatized, all figure in their little rôles. Tobo and the Sand-hill Stag parade upon the same pages as Mr. Christy's *débutantes* and Mr. Smedley's business men, and, if you please, have their love affairs and business in precisely the same spirit. All this can not but be significant, and, let us be assured, significant of good. The New England school for too long dominated the entire range of American fiction—limiting it, specializing it, polishing, refining and embellishing it, narrowing it down to a veritable cult, a thing to be safeguarded by the elect, the few, the aristocracy. It is small wonder that the reaction came when and as it did; small wonder that the wearied public, roused at length, smashed its idols with such vehemence; small wonder that, declaring its independence and finding itself suddenly untrammeled and unguided, it flew off *mobbishly* toward false gods, good only because they were new.

All this is small wonder. The great wonder is this return to nature, this unerring groping backward toward the fundamentals, in

order to take a renewed grip upon life. If you care to see a proof of how vital it is, how valuable, look into some of the magazines of the seventies and eighties. It is astonishing to consider that we ever found an interest in them. The effect is like entering a darkened room. And not only the magazines, but the entire literature of the years before the nineties is shadowed and oppressed with the bugbear of "literature." Outdoor life was a thing apart from our reading. Even the tales and serials whose *mise en scène* was in the country had no breath of the country in them. The "literature" in them suffocated the life, and the humans with their everlasting consciences, their heated and artificial activities, filled all the horizon, admitting the larks and the robins only as accessories; considering the foxes, the deer and the rabbits only as creatures to be killed, to be pursued, to be exterminated. But Mr. Seton and his school, and the Mowbrays, and the Ollivants, the Dugmores and the Wallihans opened a door, opened a window, and mere literature has had to give place to life. The sun has come in and the great winds, and the smell of the baking alkali on the Arizona deserts, and the reek of the tar-weed on the Colorado slopes; and nature has ceased to exist as a classification of science, has ceased to be *mis*-understood as an aggregate of botany, zoölogy, geology and the like, and has become a thing intimate and familiar and rejuvenating.

There is no doubt that the estate of American letters is experiencing a renaissance. Formality, the old idols, the demi-gorgons and autocrats no longer hold an absolute authority. A multitude of false gods are clamoring for recognition, shouldering one another about to make room for their altars, soliciting incense as if it were patronage. No doubt these "draw many after them," but the "nature revival" has brought the galvanizing, vital element into this tumult of little inkling sham divinities and has shown that life is better than "literature," even if the "literature" be of human beings and the life be that of a faithful dog.

Vitality is the thing, after all. Dress the human puppet never so gayly, bedeck it never so brilliantly, pipe before it never so cunningly, and, fashioned in the image of God though it be, just so long as it is a puppet and not a person, just so long the great heart of the people will turn from it, in weariness and disgust, to find its interest in the fidelity of the sheep-dog of the North o' England, the intelligence of a prairie wolf of Colorado, or the death-fight of a bull moose in the timberlands of Ontario.

THE MECHANICS OF FICTION

We approach a delicate subject. And if the manner of approach is too serious it will be very like the forty thousand men of the King of France who marched terribly and with banners to the top of the hill with the meagre achievement of simply getting there. Of all the arts, as one has previously observed, that of novel-writing is the least mechanical. Perhaps, after all, rightly so; still it is hard to escape some formality, some forms. There must always be chapter divisions; also a beginning and an end, which implies a middle; continuity, which implies movement, which in turn implies a greater speed or less, an accelerated, retarded or broken action; and before the scoffer is well aware he is admitting a multitude of set forms. No one who sets a thing in motion but keeps an eye and a hand upon its speed. No one who constructs but keeps watch upon the building, strengthening here, lightening there, here at the foundations cautious and conservative, there at the cornice fantastic and daring. In all human occupations, trades, arts or business, science, morals or religion, there exists, 'way at the bottom, a homogeneity and a certain family likeness, so that, quite possibly after all, the discussion of the importance of the mechanics of fiction may be something more than mere speculative sophistry.

A novel addresses itself primarily to a reader, and it has been so indisputably established that the reader's time and effort of attention must be economized that the fact need not be mentioned in this place—it would not economize the reader's time nor effort of attention.

Remains then the means to be considered, or, in other words, How best to tell your story.

It depends naturally upon the nature of the story. The formula which would apply to one would not be appropriate for another. That is very true, but at the same time it is hard to get away from that thing in any novel which is let us call the pivotal event All good novels have one. It is the peg upon which the fabric of the thing hangs, the nucleus around which the shifting drifts and currents must—suddenly—coagulate, the sudden releasing of the brake

to permit for one instant the entire machinery to labor, full steam, ahead. Up to that point the action must lead; from it, it must decline.

But—and here one holds at least one mechanical problem—the approach, the leading up to this pivotal event, must be infinitely slower than the decline. For the reader's interest in the story centres around it, and once it is disposed of attention is apt to dwindle very rapidly—and thus back we go again to the economy proposition.

It is the slow approach, however, that tells. The unskilled, impatient of the tedium of meticulous elaboration, will rush at it in a furious gallop of short chapters and hurried episodes, so that he may come the sooner to the purple prose declamation and drama that he is sure he can handle with such tremendous effect.

Not so the masters. Watch them during the first third—say—of their novels. Nothing happens—or at least so you fancy. People come and go, plans are described, localities, neighborhoods; an incident crops up just for a second for which you can see no reason, a note sounds that is puzzlingly inappropriate. The novel continues. There seems to be no progress; again that perplexing note, but a little less perplexing. By now we are well into the story. There are no more new people, but the old ones come back again and again, and yet again; you remember them now after they are off the stage; you are more intimate with the two main characters. Then comes a series of petty incidents in which these two are prominent. The action still lags, but little by little you are getting more and more acquainted with these principal actors. Then perhaps comes the first acceleration of movement. The approach begins—ever so little—to rise, and that same note which seemed at first so out of tune sounds again and this time drops into place in the progression, beautifully harmonious, correlating the whole gamut. By now all the people are "on"; by now all the groundwork is prepared. You know the localities so well that you could find your way about among them in the dark; hero and heroine are intimate acquaintances.

Now the action begins to increase in speed. The complication suddenly tightens; all along the line there runs a sudden alert. An episode far back there in the first chapter, an episode with its appropriate group of characters, is brought forward and, coming suddenly to the front, collides with the main line of development and sends it off upon an untirely unlooked-for tangent. Another

episode of the second chapter—let us suppose—all at once makes common cause with a more recent incident, and the two produce a wholly unlooked-for counter-influence which swerves the main theme in still another direction, and all this time the action is speeding faster and faster, the complication tightening and straining to the breaking point, and then at last a "motif" that has been in preparation ever since the first paragraph of the first chapter of the novel suddenly comes to a head, and in a twinkling the complication is solved with all the violence of an explosion, and the catastrophe, the climax, the pivotal event fairly leaps from the pages with a rush of action that leaves you stunned, breathless and overwhelmed with the sheer power of its presentation. And there is a master-work of fiction.

Reading, as the uninitiated do, without an eye to the mechanics, without a consciousness of the wires and wheels and cogs and springs of the affair, it seems inexplicable that these great scenes of fiction—short as they are—some of them less than a thousand words in length—should produce so tremendous an effect by such few words, such simple language; and that sorely overtaxed word, "genius," is made to do duty as the explanation. But the genius is rare that in one thousand simple words, taken by themselves, could achieve the effect—for instance—of the fight aboard "The Flying Scud" in Stevenson's "Wrecker." Taken by itself, the scene is hardly important except from the point of view of style and felicity of expression. It is the context of the story that makes it so tremendous, and because Osbourne and Stevenson prepared for that very scene from the novel's initial chapter.

And it seems as if there in a phrase one could resume the whole system of fiction mechanics—preparations of effect.

The unskilled will invariably attempt to atone for lack of such painstaking preparation for their "Grand Scenes" by hysteria, and by exclamation in presenting the catastrophe. They declaim, they shout stamp, shake their fists and flood the page with sonorous adjectives, call upon heaven and upon God. They summon to their aid every broken-down device to rouse the flaccid interest of the reader, and conclusively, irretrievably and ignominiously fail. It is too late for heroic effort then, and the reader, uninterested in the character, unfamiliar with the *locale*, unattracted by any charm of "atmosphere," lays down the book unperturbed and forgets it before dinner.

Where is the fault? Is it not in defective machinery? The

analogies are multitudinous. The liner with hastily constructed boilers will flounder when she comes to essay the storm; and no stoking however vigorous, no oiling however eager, if delayed till then, will avail to aid her to ride through successfully. It is not the time to strengthen a wall when the hurricane threatens; prop and stay will not brace it then. Then the thing that tells is the plodding, slow, patient, brick-by-brick work, that only half shows down there at the foot half-hidden in the grass, obscure, unnoted. No genius is necessary for this sort of work, only great patience and a willingness to plod, for the time being.

No one is expected to strike off the whole novel in one continued fine frenzy of inspiration. As well expect the stone-mason to plant his wall in a single day. Nor is it possible to lay down any rule of thumb, any hard-and-fast schedule in the matter of novel-writing. But no work is so ephemeral, so delicate, so—in a word—artistic that it can not be improved by systematizing.

There is at least one indisputably good manner in which the unskilled may order his work—besides the one of preparation already mentioned. He may consider each chapter as a unit, distinct, separate, having a definite beginning, rise, height and end, the action continuous, containing no break in time, the locality unchanged throughout—no shifting of the scene to another environment. Each chapter thus treated is a little work in itself, and the great story of the whole novel is told thus as it were in a series of pictures, the author supplying information as to what has intervened between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next by suggestion or by actual *résumé*. As often as not the reader himself can fill up the gap by the context.

This may be over-artificial, and it is conceivable that there are times when it is necessary to throw artificiality to the winds. But it is the method that many of the greatest fiction writers have employed, and even a defective system is—at any rate, in fiction—better than none.

FICTION WRITING AS A BUSINESS

The exaggerated and exalted ideas of the unenlightened upon this subject are, I have found, beyond all reason and beyond all belief. The superstition that with the publication of the first book comes fame and affluence is as firmly rooted as that other delusion which asks us to suppose that "a picture in the Paris Salon" is the certificate of success, ultimate, final, definite.

One knows, of course, that very naturally the "Eben Holden" and "David Harum" and "Richard Carvel" fellows made fortunes, and that these are out of the discussion; but also one chooses to assume that the average, honest, middle-class author supports himself and even a family by the sale of his novels—lives on his royalties.

Royalties! Why in the name of heaven were they called that, those microscopic sums that too, too often are less royal than beggarly? It has a fine sound—royalty. It fills the mouth. It can be said with an air—royalty. But there are plenty of these same royalties that will not pay the typewriter's bill.

Take an average case. No, that will not do, either, for the average published novel—I say it with my right hand raised—is irretrievably, hopelessly and conclusively, a financial failure.

Take, then, an unusually lucky instance, literally a novel whose success is extraordinary, a novel which has sold 2,500 copies. I repeat that this is an extraordinary success. Not one book out of fifteen will do as well. But let us consider it. The author has worked upon it for—at the very least—three months. It is published. Twenty-five hundred copies are sold. Then the sale stops. And by the word stop one means cessation in the completest sense of the word. There are people—I know plenty of them—who suppose that when a book is spoken of as having stopped selling, a generality is intended, that merely a falling off of the initial demand has occurred. Error. When a book—a novel—stops selling, it stops with the definiteness of an engine when the fire goes out. It stops with a suddenness that is appalling, and thereafter not a copy,

not one single, solitary copy is sold. And do not for an instant suppose that ever after the interest may be revived. A dead book can no more be resuscitated than a dead dog.

But to go back. The 2,500 have been sold. The extraordinary, the marvelous has been achieved. What does the author get out of it? A royalty of ten per cent. Two hundred and fifty dollars for three months' hard work. Roughly less than $20 a week, a little more than $2.50 a day. An expert carpenter will easily make twice that, and the carpenter has infinitely the best of it in that he can keep the work up year in and year out, where the novelist must wait for a new idea, and the novel writer must then jockey and manœuvre for publication. Two novels a year is about as much as the writer can turn out and yet keep a marketable standard. Even admitting that both the novels sell 2,500 copies, there is only $500 of profit. In the same time the carpenter has made his $1,800, nearly four times as much. One may well ask the question: Is fiction writing a money-making profession?

The astonishing thing about the affair is that a novel may make a veritable stir, almost a sensation, and yet fail to sell very largely.

There is so-and-so's book. Everywhere you go you hear about it. Your friends have read it. It is in demand at the libraries. You don't pick up a paper that does not contain a review of the story in question. It is in the "Books of the Month" column. It is even, even—the pinnacle of achievement—in that shining roster, the list of best sellers of the week.

Why, of course, the author is growing rich! Ah, at last he has arrived! No doubt he will build a country house out of his royalties. Lucky fellow; one envies him.

Catch him unawares and what is he doing? As like as not writing unsigned book reviews at five dollars a week in order to pay his board bill—and glad of the chance.

It seems incredible. But one must remember this: That for every one person who buys a book there will be six who will talk about it. And the half-thousand odd reviewers who are writing of the book do not buy it, but receive "editorial" copies from the publishers, upon which no royalty is paid.

I know it for an undisputed fact that a certain novel which has ever been called the best American novel of the nineteenth century, and which upon publication was talked about, written about and even preached about, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, took ten years in which to attain the sale of 10,000 copies. Even so famous,

so brilliant an author as Harold Frederic did not at first sell conspicuously. "That Lawton Girl," "The Copperhead," "Seth's Brother's Wife," masterpieces though they are, never made money for the writer. Each sold about 2,000 copies. Not until "Theron Ware" was published did Mr. Frederic reap his reward.

Even so great a name as that of George Meredith is not a "sesame," and only within the last few years has the author of "Evan Harrington" made more than five or six hundred dollars out of any one of his world-famous books.

But of course there is another side. For one thing, the author is put to no expense in the composing of his novel. (It is not always necessary to typewrite the manuscript.) The carpenter must invest much money in tools; must have a shop. Shop rent and tools repaired or replaced cut into his $1,800 of profit. Or take it in the fine arts. The painter must have a studio, canvases, models, brushes, a whole equipment; the architect must have his draughting room, the musician his instrument. But so far as initial expense is concerned, a half-dollar will buy every conceivable necessary tool the novelist may demand. He needs no office, shop or studio; models are not required. The libraries of the city offer him a quiet working place if the home is out of the question. Nor, as one has so often urged, is any expensive training necessary before his money-earning capacity is attained. The architect must buy instruction for many years. The painter must study in expensive studios, the musician must learn in costly conservatories, the singer must be taught by high-priced maestros. Furthermore, it is often necessary for the aspirant to travel great distances to reach the cities where his education is to be furthered; almost invariably a trip to and a residence in Europe is indispensable. It is a great undertaking and an expensive one to prepare for the professions named, and it takes years of time—years during which the aspirant is absolutely non-productive.

But the would-be novel writer may determine between breakfast and dinner to essay the plunge, buy (for a few cents) ink and paper between dinner and supper, and have the novel under way before bedtime.

How much of an outlay of money does his first marketable novel represent? Practically nothing. On the other hand, let us ask the same question of, say, the painter. How much money has he had to spend before he was able to paint his first marketable picture? To reach a total sum he must foot up the expenses of at

least five years of instruction and study, the cost of living during that time, the cost of materials, perhaps even the price of a trip to Paris. Easily the sum may reach $5,000. Fifty cents' worth of ink and paper do not loom large beside this figure.

Then there are other ways in which the fiction writer may earn money—by fiction. The novelist may look down upon the mere writer of short stories, or may even look down upon himself in the same capacity, but as a rule the writer of short stories is the man who has the money. It is much easier to sell the average short story than the average novel. Infinitely easier. And the short story of the usual length will fetch $100. One thousand people—think of it—one thousand people must buy copies of your novel before it will earn so much for you. It takes three months to complete the novel—the novel that earns the $250. But with ingenuity the writer should be able to turn out six short stories in the same time, and if he has luck in placing them there is $600 earned—more than twice the sum made by the novel. So that the novelist may eke out the alarming brevity of his semi-annual statements by writing and selling "short stuff."

Then—so far as the novel is concerned—there is one compensation, one source of revenue which the writer enjoys, and which is, as a rule, closed to all others. Once the carpenter sells his piece of work it is sold for good and all. The painter has but one chance to make money from the sale of his picture. The architect receives payment for his design and there is the end. But the novelist—and one speaks now of the American—may sell the same work over many times. Of course, if the novel is a failure it is a failure, and no more is said. But suppose it is a salable, readable, brisk bit of narrative, with a swift action and rapid movement. Properly managed, this, under favorable conditions, might be its life history: First it is serialized either in the Sunday press or, less probably, in a weekly or monthly. Then it is made up into book form and sent over the course a second time. The original publisher sells sheets to a Toronto or Montreal house and a Canadian edition reaps a like harvest. It is not at all unlikely that a special cheap cloth edition may be bought and launched by some large retailer either of New York or Chicago. Then comes the paper edition—with small royalties, it is true, but based upon an enormous number of copies, for the usual paper edition is an affair of tens of thousands. Next the novel crosses the Atlantic and a small sale in England helps to swell the net returns, which again are added to—possibly—by

the "colonial edition" which the English firm issues. Last of all comes the Tauchnitz edition, and with this (bar the improbable issuing of later special editions) the exploitation ceases. Eight separate times the same commodity has been sold, no one of the sales militating against the success of the other seven, the author getting his fair slice every time. Can any other trade, profession or art (excepting only the dramatist, which is, after all, a sister art) show the like? Even (speaking of the dramatist) there may be a ninth reincarnation of the same story and the creatures of the writer's pages stalk forth upon the boards in cloak and buskin.

And there are the indirect ways in which he may earn money. Some of his ilk there are who lecture. Nor are there found wanting those who read from their own works. Some write editorials or special articles in the magazines and newspapers with literary departments. But few of them have "princely" incomes.

THE "VOLUNTEER MANUSCRIPT"

At a conservative estimate there are 70,000,000 people in the United States. At a liberal estimate 100,000 of these have lost the use of both arms; remain then 69,900,000 who write novels. Indeed, many are called, but few—oh, what a scanty, skimped handful that few represent—are chosen!

The work of choosing these few, or rather of rejecting these many, devolves upon the manuscript readers for the baker's dozen of important New York publishing houses, and a strange work it is, and strange are the contributions that pass under their inspection.

As one not unfamiliar with the work of "reading," the present writer may offer a little seasonable advice.

1. First have your manuscript typewritten. The number of manuscripts is too great and the time too short to expect the reader to decipher script; and, besides, ideas presented or scenes described in type are infinitely more persuasive, more plausible than those set down in script. A good story typewritten will appear to better advantage; a poor one similarly treated seems less poverty-stricken.

2. Do not, by any manner of means, announce in a prefatory note that you "lay no claim to literary excellence," with the intention thereby of ingratiating yourself with regard to the "reader," winning him over by a parade of modesty. Invariably the statement is prejudicial, producing an effect exactly contrary to the one desired. It will make the mildest of "readers" angry. If you have no claims upon literary excellence, why in Heaven's name are you bothering him to read your work?

3. Inclose a forwarding address in case of rejection. This, seemingly, is superfluous advice. But it is astonishing how many manuscripts come in innocent even of the author's name, with never a scrap nor clew as to their proper destination.

4. Don't ask for criticism. The reader is not a critic. He passes only upon the availability of the manuscript for the uses of the publisher who employs him. And a manuscript of para-

mount literary quality may be rejected for any number of reasons, none of which have anything to do with its literary worth—or accepted for causes equally outside the domain of letters. Criticism is one thing, professional "reading" quite another.

5. Don't bother about "inclosing stamps for return." The manuscript will go back to you by c. o. d. express.

6. Don't submit a part of a manuscript. It is hard enough sometimes to judge the story as a whole, and no matter how discouraging the initial chapter may be the publisher will always ask to see the remaining portions before deciding.

7. Don't write to the publisher beforehand asking him if he will consider your manuscript. If it is a novel he will invariably express his willingness to consider it. How can he tell whether he wants it or not until he, through his "reader," has seen it?

8. Don't expect to get an answer much before a month. Especially if your story has merit, it must pass through many hands and be considered by many persons before judgment is rendered. The better it is the longer you will wait before getting a report.

9. Don't in Heaven's name, inclose commendatory letters written by your friends, favorable reviews by your pastor or by the president of the local college. The story will speak for itself more distinctly than any of your acquaintances.

10. Don't say you will revise or shorten to suit the tastes or judgment of the publisher. At best that's a servile humility that in itself is a confession of weakness and that will make you no friends at court.

11. Don't forward a letter of introduction, no matter from how near a friend of the publisher. The publisher will only turn the MS. over to his "readers," and with them the letter from a stranger carries no weight.

12. Don't write a Colonial novel.

13. Don't write a Down East novel.

14. Don't write a "Prisoner of Zenda" novel.

15. Don't write a novel.

16. Try to keep your friends from writing novels.

And of all the rules, one is almost tempted to declare that the last two are the most important. For to any one genuinely interested in finding "good stuff" in the ruck and run of volunteer manuscripts, nothing is more discouraging, nothing more apparently hopeless of ultimate success, than the consistent and uniform trashiness of the day's batch of submitted embryonic novels.

Infinitely better for their author had they never been written; infinitely better for him had he employed his labor—at the very least it is labor of three months—upon the trade or profession to which he was bred. It is very hard work to write a good novel, but it is much harder to write a bad one. Its very infelicity is a snare to the pen, its very clumsiness a constant demand for laborious boosting and propping.

And consider another and further word of advice—number 17, if you please. Don't go away with that popular idea that your manuscript will not be considered, or if really and undeniably good will be heedlessly rejected. Bad manuscripts are not read from cover to cover. The reader has not the right to waste his employer's time in such unremunerative diligence. Often a page or two will betray the hopelessness of the subsequent chapters, and no one will demand of the "reader" a perusal of a work that he knows will be declined in the end.

Nor was there ever a sincere and earnest effort that went unappreciated in a publisher's place of business. I have seen an entire office turned upside down by a "reader" who believed he had discovered among the batch of voluminous MS. something "really good, you know," and who almost forced a reading of the offering in question upon every member of the firm from the senior partner down to the assistant salesman.

As a rule, all manuscripts follow the same routine. From the clerk who receives them at the hands of the expressman they go to the recorder, who notes the title, address, and date of arrival, and also, after turning them over to the junior reader, the fact of the transfer. The junior reader's report upon the manuscript is turned in to one of the members of the firm, whose decision is final. The manuscript itself goes up to the senior reader, who also reports upon it to the firm member. If both reports are unfavorable, this latter directs the manuscript to be returned with or without a personal letter, as he deems proper. If both the readers' reports are favorable, or even if one is sufficiently laudatory, he calls for the manuscript and reads it himself. If he disagrees with the readers' reports, the manuscript is declined. If not, he passes the manuscript on to one of the partners of the house, who also reads it. The two "talk it over," and out of the conference comes the ultimate decision in the matter.

Sometimes the circulation manager and head salesman are consulted to decide whether or not—putting all questions of the book's

literary merits aside—the "thing will sell." And doubt not for a moment that their counsel carries weight.

Another feature of the business which it is very well to remember is that all publishers can not be held responsible for the loss of or damage to unsolicited manuscripts. If you submit the MS. of a novel you do it at your own risk, and the carelessness of an office-boy may lose for you the work of many months—years, even; work that you could never do over again. You could demand legally no reparation. The publishers are not responsible. Only in a case where a letter signed by one of the "heads" has been sent to the author requesting that the manuscript be forwarded does the situation become complicated. But in the case of an unknown writer the monetary value of his work in a court of law would be extremely difficult to place, and even if an award of damages could be extorted it would hardly more than pay the typewriter's bill.

But the loss of manuscript may be of serious import to the publisher for all that. That reputation for negligence in the matter of handling unsolicited matter fastens upon a firm with amazing rapidity. Bothersome as the number of volunteer manuscripts are, they do—to a certain extent—gauge the importance of a given concern. And as they arrive in constantly increasing quantities, the house may know that it is growing in favor and in reputation: and so a marked falling off reverses the situation. Writers will be naturally averse to submitting manuscripts to offices which are known to be careless. And I know of at least one instance where the loss of a couple of manuscripts within a month produced a marked effect upon the influx of the volunteers. Somehow the news of the loss always gets out, and spreads by some mysterious means till it is heard of from strangely remote quarters. The author will, of course, tell his friends of the calamity, and will make more ado over the matter than if his story was accepted. Of course, this particular story is the one great masterpiece of his career; the crass stupidity of the proud and haughty publisher has ruined his chance of success, and the warning: "Don't send your stuff to that firm. It will be lost!" is passed on all along the line. So that repeated instances of the negligence may in the end embarrass the publisher, and the real masterpiece, the first novel of a New Man, goes to a rival.

I have in mind one case where a manuscript was lost under peculiarly distressing circumstances. The "reader," who had his

office in the editorial rooms of a certain important house of New York, was on a certain day called to the reception room to interview one of the host of writers who came daily to submit their offerings in person.

In this case the reader confronted a little gentleman in the transition period of genteel decay. He was a Frenchman. His mustache, tight, trim, and waxed, was white. The frock coat was buttoned only at the waist; a silk handkerchief puffed from the pocket, and a dried carnation, lamentably faded, that had done duty for many days, enlivened with a feeble effort the worn silk lapel.

But the innate French effervescence, debonair, *insouciant*, was not gone yet. The little gentleman presented a card. Of course the name boasted that humblest of titles—baron. The Baron, it appeared, propitiated destiny by "Instruction in French, German, and Italian," but now instruction was no longer propitious. With a deprecating giggle this was explained; the Baron did not wish to make the "reader" feel bad—to embarrass him.

"I will probably starve very soon," he observed, still with the modifying little giggle, and, of course, the inevitable shrug, "unless—my faith—something turns up."

It was to be turned up, evidently, by means of an attenuated manuscript which he presented. He had written—during the intervals of instruction—a series of articles on the character of Americans as seen by a Frenchman, and these had been published by a newspaper of the town in which he instructed—an absolutely obscure town, lost and forgotten, away up among the New Hampshire hills.

The articles, he insinuated, might be made into a book—a book that might be interesting to the great American public. And, with a *naiveté* that was absolutely staggering, he assumed without question that the firm would publish his book—that it was really an important contribution to American literature.

He would admit that he had not been paid very liberally by the country paper for the articles as they appeared. He was not Emile Zola. If he was he might have sold his articles at fifteen or twenty dollars each.

He said just that. Think of it! The poor little Instructor-Baron Zola! Fifteen dollars! Well!

He left the articles—neatly cut out and pasted in a copy-book—with the "reader," and gave as his address a dreadfully obscure hotel.

The "reader" could not make up his mouth to tell him, even before looking over the first paragraph of the first article, that as a book the commercial value of the offering was absolutely, irrevocably, and hopelessly nil, and so the little manuscript went into the mill—and in two days was lost.

I suppose that never in the history of that particular firm was the search for a missing manuscript prosecuted with half the energy or ardor that ensued upon the discovery of this particular loss. From the desk-files of the senior partner to the shipping-slips of the packer's assistant the hunt proceeded—and all in vain.

Meanwhile the day approached on which the Baron was to come for his answer and at last it arrived, and promptly at the appointed hour the poor little card with the hyphenated titled name written carefully and with beautiful flourishes in diluted ink was handed in.

Do you know what the publisher did? He wrote the absurd, pompous name across the order line of a check and signed his own name underneath, and the check was for an amount that would make even unpropitious Destiny take off his hat and bow politely.

And I tell you that my little Instructor-Baron, with eminent good-humor, but with the grand manner of a *Maréchal du royaume* waved it aside. Turenne could have been no more magnificent. (They do order these matters better in France.) His whole concern—hunger-pinched as he may easily have been at the very moment—his whole concern was to put the embarrassed publisher at his ease, to make this difficulty less difficult.

He assured him that his articles were written *comme-ci comme-ca,* for his own amusement, that he could not think of accepting, etc.

And I like to remember that this whole affair, just as if it had been prepared in advance for a popular magazine whose editor insisted upon "happy endings," did end well, and the publisher, who at the moment was involved in the intricacies of a vast correspondence with a Parisian publishing house, found a small position as translator in one of his sub-departments for the little Instructor-Baron who had the great good fortune to suffer the loss of a manuscript—in the right place.

And now the card—engraved, if you please—bears proudly the Baron's name, supported by the inscription, "Official Translator and Director of Foreign Correspondence to the Firm of —— & Co., Publishers."

RETAIL BOOKSELLER: LITERARY DICTATOR

Of all the various and different kinds and characters of people who are concerned in the writing and making of a novel, including the author, the publisher, the critic, the salesman, the advertisement writer, the drummer—of all this "array of talent," as the billboards put it, which one has the most influence in the success of the book? Who, of all these, can, if he chooses, help or hurt the sales the most?—assuming for the moment that sales are the index of success, the kind of success that at the instant we are interested in.

Each one of these people has his followers and champions. There are not found wanting those who say the publisher is the all-in-all. And again it is said that a critic of authority can make a book by a good review or ruin it by an unfavorable one. The salesman, others will tell you—he who is closest allied to the money transaction—can exert the all-powerful influence. Or again, surely in this day of exploitation and publicity the man who concocts great "ads" is the important one.

The author is next included. He can do no more than write the book, and as good books have failed and bad ones have succeeded—always considering failure and success in their most sordid meanings—the mere writing need not figure. But the fact remains that there are cases where publishers have exerted every device to start a book and still have known it to remain upon their hands; that critics have raved to heaven or damned to hell, and the novel has fallen or flown in spite and not because of them; that salesmen have cajoled, and schemed, and yet have returned with unfilled orders, and that advertisements that have clamored so loudly that even they who ran must have read, and yet the novel in question remained inert, immovable, a failure, a "plug."

All these, then, have been tried and at times have been found wanting. There yet remains one exponent of the business of distributing fiction who has not been considered. He, one claims, can do more than any or all of the gentlemen just mentioned to launch or strand a novel.

Now let it be understood that by no possible manner of means does one consider him infallible. Again and again have his best efforts come to nothing. This, however, is what is claimed: he has more influence on success or failure than any of the others. And who is he?

The retailer. One can almost affirm that he is a determining factor in American fiction; that, in a limited sense, with him, his is the future. Author, critic, analyst and essayist may hug to themselves a delusive phantom of hope that they are the molders of public opinion, they and they alone. That may be, sometimes. But consider the toiling and spinning retailer. What does the failure or success of the novel mean to the critic? Nothing more than a minute and indefinite increase or decrease of prestige. The publisher who has many books upon his list may recoup himself on one failure by a compensating success. The salesman's pay goes on just the same whether his order slips are full or blank; likewise the stipend of the writer of "ads." The author has no more to lose—materially—than the price of ink and paper. But to the retail bookseller a success means money made; failure, money lost. If he can dispose of an order of fifty books he is ahead by calculable, definite, concrete profits. If he can not dispose of the fifty his loss is equally calculable, equally definite, equally concrete. Naturally, being a business man, he is a cautious man. He will not order a book which he deems unsalable, but he will lay in a stock of one that promises returns. Through him the book is distributed to the public. If he has a book in stock, the public gets it. If he does not have it, the public goes without. The verdict of the public is the essential to popularity or unpopularity, and the public can only pass verdict upon what it has read. The connection seems clear and the proposition proved that the retail bookseller is an almost paramount influence in American literature.

It is interesting to see what follows from this and to note how the retailer in the end can effectually throttle the sham novelist who has fooled the public once. Were it not for the retailer, the sham novelist would get an indefinite number of chances for his life; but so long as the small book-dealer lives and acts, just so long will bad work—and one means by this wholly bad, admittedly bad, hopelessly bad work—fail to trick the reading public twice. Observe now the working of it. Let us take a typical case. A story by an unknown writer is published. By strenuous exploitation the publishers start a vogue. The book begins to sell. The retailer, ob-

serving the campaign of publicity managed by the publishers, stocks up with the volume; surely when the publishers are backing the thing so strong it will be a safe venture; surely the demand will be great. It does prove a safe venture; the demand is great; the retailer disposes of fifty, then of a second order of one hundred, then of two hundred, then of five hundred. The book is now in the hands of the public. It is read and found sadly, sadly wanting. It is not a good story; it is trivial; it is insincere. Far and wide the story is condemned.

Meanwhile the unknown writer, now become famous, is writing a second novel. It is finished, issued, and the salesman who travels for the publishers begins to place his orders. The retailer, remembering the success of this author's past venture, readily places a large order. Two hundred is not, in his opinion, an overstock. So it goes all over the country. Returns are made to the author, and he sees that some fifty thousand have been sold. Encouraging, is it not? Yes, fifty thousand have been sold—by the publisher to the retailer; but here is the point—not by the retailer to the public. Of the two hundred our dealer took from the publisher's traveling salesman, one hundred and ninety yet remain upon his counters. The public, fooled once, on the first over-praised, over-exploited book, refuse to be taken in a second time. Who is the loser now? Not the author, who draws royalties on copies sold to the tradesman—the retailer; not the publisher, who makes his profit out of the same transaction; but the retailer, who is loaded down with an unsalable article.

Meanwhile our author writes his third novel. So far as he can see, his second book is as great a popular success as his first. His semi-annual statements are there to show it—there it is in black and white; figures can't lie. The third novel is finished and launched. At the end of the first six months after publication day the author gets his publisher's statement of sales. Instead of the expected 10,000 copies sold, behold the figure is a bare 1,500. At the end of the second six months the statement shows about 250. The book has failed. Why? Because the retailer refuses to order it. He has said to the soliciting salesman, "Why should I, in Heaven's name, take a third book by this man when I have yet one hundred and ninety copies of his second novel yet to sell?"

It is hard for the salesman to controvert that argument. He may argue that the third book is a masterpiece, and—mark this—it may in fact be a veritable, actual masterpiece, a wonderful contribu-

tion to the world's literature; it is all of no effect. There stands the block of unsold books, 190 strong, and all the eloquence in the world will not argue them off the counter. After this our author's publisher will have none of his books. Even if he writes a fourth and submits it, the publisher incontinently declines it. This author is no longer a "business proposition."

There can not but be an element of satisfaction in all this, and a source of comfort to those who take the welfare of their country's literature seriously to heart. The sham novelist who is in literature (what shall we say?) "for his own pocket every time" sooner or later meets the wave of reaction that he can not stem nor turn and under which he and his sham are conclusively, definitely, and irrevocably buried. Observe how it works out all down the line. He fools himself all of the time, he fools the publisher three times, he fools the retail dealer twice, and he fools the Great American Public just exactly once.

AN AMERICAN SCHOOL OF FICTION?

It seems to me that it is a proposition not difficult of demonstration that the United States of America has never been able to boast of a school of fiction distinctively its own. And this is all the more singular when one considers that in all other activities Americans are peculiarly independent in thought and in deed, and have acquired abroad a reputation—even a notoriety—for being original.

In the mechanical arts, in the industries, in politics, in business methods, in diplomacy, in shipbuilding, in war, even in dentistry, if you please—even in the matter of riding race-horses—Americans have evolved their own methods, quite different from European methods.

Hardy and adventurous enough upon all other lines, disdainful of conventions, contemptuous of ancient custom, we yet lag behind in the arts—slow to venture from the path blazed long ago by Old World masters.

It is pre-eminently so in the fine arts. No sooner does an American resolve upon a career of painting, sculpture, or architecture than straight he departs for Paris, the Beaux Arts and the Julien atelier; and, his education finished, returns to propagate French ideas, French methods; and our best paintings to-day are more French than American; French in conception, in composition, in technique and treatment.

I suppose that the nearest we ever came to an organized school of native-born Americans, writing about American things from an American point of view, was in the days of Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, and the rest of that illustrious company. But observe: How is this group spoken of and known to literature? Not as the American school, but as the New England school. Even the appellation "New" England as differentiated from "old" England is significant. And New England is not America.

Hawthorne, it will be urged, is a great name among American

writers of fiction. Not peculiarly American, however. Not so distinctively and unequivocally as to lay claim to a vigorous original Americanism. "The Scarlet Letter" is not an American story, but rather a story of an English colony on North American soil. "The Marble Faun" is frankly and unreservedly foreign. Even the other novels were pictures of a very limited and circumscribed life—the life of New England again.

Cooper, you will say, was certainly American in attitude and choice of subject; none more so. None less, none less American. As a novelist he is saturated with the romance of the contemporary English story-tellers. It is true that his background is American. But his heroes and heroines talk like the characters out of Bulwer in their most vehement moods, while his Indians stalk through all the melodramatic tableaux of Byron, and declaim in the periods of the border noblemen in the pages of Walter Scott.

Poe we may leave out of classification; he shone in every branch of literature but that of novel-writing. Bret Harte was a writer of short stories and—oh, the pity of it, the folly of it!—abandoned the field with hardly more than a mere surface-scratching.

There can be no doubt that had Mr. Henry James remained in America he would have been our very best writer. If he has been able to seize the character and characteristics so forcibly of a people like the English, foreign to him, different, unfamiliar, what might he not have done in the very midst of his own countrymen, into whose company he was born, reared and educated? All the finish of style, the marvelous felicity of expression would still have been his, and at the same time, by the very nature of the life he lived and wrote about, the concrete, the vigorous, the simple direct action would have become a part of his work, instead of the present ultimate vagueness and indecision that so mars and retards it.

Of all the larger names remain only those of Mr. Howells and Mr. Clemens. But as the novelists, as such, are under consideration, even Mark Twain may be left out of the discussion. American to the core, posterity will yet know him not as a novel-writer, but as a humorist. Mr. Howells alone is left, then, after the elimination is complete. Of all producers of American fiction he has had the broadest vision, at once a New Englander and a New Yorker, an Easterner and—in the Eastern sense—a Westerner. But one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one writer constitute

a "school." Mr. Howells has had no successors. Instead, just as we had with "Lapham" and "The Modern Instance" laid the foundation of fine, hardy literature, that promised to be our very, very own, we commence to build upon it a whole confused congeries of borrowed, faked, pilfered romanticisms, building a crumbling gothic into a masonry of honest brownstone, or foisting colonial porticos upon façades of Montpelier granite, and I can not allow this occasion to pass without protest against what I am sure every serious-minded reader must consider a lamentable discrowning.

Of the latter-day fiction writers Miss Wilkins had more than all others convinced her public of her sincerity. Her field was her own; the place was ceded to her. No other novelist could invade her domain and escape the censure that attaches to imitation. Her public was loyal to her because it believed in her, and it was a foregone conclusion that she would be loyal to it.

More than this: A writer who occupies so eminent a place as Miss Wilkins, who has become so important, who has exerted and still can exert so strong an influence, cannot escape the responsibilities of her position. She can not belong wholly to herself, can not be wholly independent. She owes a duty to the literature of her native country.

Yet in spite of all this, and in spite of the fact that those who believe in the future of our nation's letters look to such established reputations as hers to keep the faith, to protest, though it is only by their attitude, silently and with dignity, against corruptions, degradations; in spite of all this, and in the heyday of her power, Miss Wilkins chooses to succumb to the momentary, transitory set of the tide, and, forsaking her own particular work, puts forth, one of a hundred others, a "colonial romance." It is a discrowning. It can be considered as no less. A deliberate capitulation to the clamor of the multitude. Possibly the novelist was sincere, but it is perilously improbable that she would have written her "Colonial Romance" had not "colonial romances" been the fashion. On the face of it Miss Wilkins has laid herself open to a suspicion of disingenuousness that every honest critic can only deplore. Even with all the sincerity in the world she had not the right to imperil the faith of her public, to undermine its confidence in her. She was one of the leaders. It is as if a captain, during action, had deserted to the enemy.

It could not have been even for the baser consideration of money. With her success assured in advance Miss Wilkins can be above such influences. Nor of fame. Surely no great distinction centres upon writers of "colonial romances" of late. Only the author herself may know her motives, but we who looked to her to keep the standard firm—and high—have now to regret the misfortune of a leader lost, a cause weakened.

However, it is a question after all if a "school," understood in the European sense of the word, is possible for America just yet. France has had its schools of naturalism and romance, Russia its schools of realism, England its schools of psychologists. But France, Russia, and England now, after so many centuries of growth, may be considered as units. Certain tendencies influence each one over its whole geographical extent at the same time. Its peoples have been welded together to a certain homogeneousness. It is under such conditions that "schools" of fiction, of philosophy, of science and the like arise.

But the United States are not yet, in the European sense, united. We have existed as a nation hardly more than a generation and during that time our peoples have increased largely by emigration. From all over the globe different races have been pouring in upon us. The North has been settled under one system, the South under another, the Middle West under another, the East under another. South Central and Far West under still others. There is no homogeneousness among us as yet.

The Westerner thinks along different lines from the Easterner and arrives at different conclusions. What is true of California is false of New York. Mr. Cable's picture of life is a far different thing than that of Mr. Howells.

The school of fiction American in thought, in purpose, and in standard. But no such thing is possible to-day for American writers. Mr. Hamlin Garland could not merge his personality nor pool his ideals with Edith Wharton. Their conceptions of art are as different as the conditions of life they study in their books.

The school of fiction American in thought, in purpose, and in treatment will come in time, inevitably. Meanwhile the best we can expect of the leaders is to remain steadfast, to keep unequivocally to the metes and bounds of the vineyards of their labors; no trespassing, no borrowing, no filching of the grapes of another man's vines. The cultivation of one's own vine is quite sufficient

for all energy. We want these vines to grow—in time—to take root deep in American soil so that by and by the fruit shall be all of our own growing.

We do not want—distinctly and vehemently we do not want—the vine-grower to leave his own grapes to rot while he flies off to the gathering of—what? The sodden lees of an ancient crushing.

NOVELISTS OF THE FUTURE

It seems to me that a great deal could be said on this subject—a great deal that has not been said before. There are so many novelists these latter days, so many whose works show that they have had no training, and it does seem that so long as the fiction writers of the United States go fumbling and stumbling along in this undisciplined fashion, governed by no rule, observing no formula, setting for themselves no equation to solve, that just so long shall we be far from the desirable thing—an American school of fiction. Just now (let us say that it is a pity) we have no school at all. We acknowledge no master, and we are playing at truant, incorrigible, unmanageable, sailing paper boats in the creek behind the schoolhouse, or fishing with bent pins in the pools and shallows of popular favor. That some catch goldfish there is no great matter, and is no excuse for the truancy. We are not there for the goldfish, if you please, but to remain in the school at work till we have been summoned to stand up in our places and tell the master what we have learned.

There's where we should be, and if we do not observe the rules and conform to some degree of order, we should be rapped on the knuckles or soundly clumped on the head, and by vigorous discipline taught to know that formulas (a—b; a+b) are important things for us to observe, and that each and all of us should address ourselves with all diligence to finding the value of x in our problems.

It is the class in the Production of Original Fiction which of all the school contains the most truants. Indeed, its members believe that schooling for them is unnecessary. Not so with the other classes. Not one single member of any single one of them who does not believe that he must study first if he would produce afterward. Observe, there on the lower benches, the assiduous little would-be carpenters and stone-masons; how carefully they con their tables of measurement, their squares and compasses. "Ah, the toilers," you say, "the grubby manual fellows—of course they must learn their trade!"

Very well, then. Consider—higher up the class, on the very front row of benches—the Fine Arts row, the little painters and architects and musicians and actors of the future. See how painfully they study, and study and study. The little stone-mason will graduate in a few months; but for these others of the Fine Arts classes there is no such thing as graduation. For them there shall never be a diploma, signed and sealed, giving them the right to call themselves perfected at their work. All their lives they shall be students. In the vacations—maybe—they write, or build, or sing, or act, but soon again they are back to the benches, studying, studying always; working as never carpenter or stone-mason worked. Now and then they get a little medal, a bit of gold and enamel, a bow of ribbon, that is all; the stone-mason would disdain it, would seek it for the value of the metal in it. The Fine Arts people treasure it as the veteran treasures his cross.

And these little medals you—the truants, the bad boys of the paper boats and the goldfish—you want them, too; you claim them and clamor for them. You who declare that no study is necessary for you; you who are not content with your catch of goldfish, you must have the bits of ribbon and enamel, too. Have you deserved them? Have you worked for them? Have you found the value of x in your equation? Have you solved the parenthesis of your problem? Have you ever done the problem at all? Have you even glanced or guessed at the equation? The shame of it be upon you! Come in from the goldfish and go to work, or stay altogether at the fishing and admit that you are not deserving of the medal which the master gives as a reward of merit.

"But there are no books that we can study," you contest. "The architect and the musician, the painter and the actor—all of these have books ready to hand; they can learn from codified, systematized knowledge. For the novelist, where is there a cut-and-dried science that he can learn that will help him?"

And that is a good contention. No, there are no such books. Of all the arts, the art of fiction has no handbook. By no man's teaching can we learn the knack of putting a novel together in the best way. No one has ever risen to say, "Here is how the plan should be; thus and so should run the outline."

We admit the fact, but neither does that excuse the goldfishing and the paper-boat business. Some day the handbook may be compiled—it is quite possible—but meanwhile, and, *faute de mieux*, there is that which you may study better than all handbooks.

Observe, now. Observe, for instance, the little painter scholars. On the fly-leaves of their schoolbooks they are making pictures—of what? Remember it, remember it and remember it—of the people around them. So is the actor, so the musician—all of the occupants of the Fine Arts bench. They are studying one another quite as much as their books—even more—and they will tell you that it is the most important course in the curriculum.

You—the truant little would-be novelist—you can do this, quite as easily as they, and for you it is all the more important, for you must make up for the intimate knowledge of your fellows what you are forced to lack in the ignorance of forms. But you can not get this knowledge out there behind the schoolhouse—hooking goldfish. Come in at the tap of the bell and, though you have no books, make pictures on your slate, pictures of the Fine Arts bench struggling all their lives for the foolish little medals, pictures of the grubby little boys in the stone-mason's corner, jeering the art classes for their empty toiling. The more you make these pictures, the better you shall do them. That is the kind of studying you can do, and from the study of your fellows you shall learn more than from the study of all the text-books that ever will be written.

But to do this you must learn to sit very quiet, and be very watchful, and so train your eyes and ears that every sound and every sight shall be significant to you and shall supply all the deficiency made by the absence of text-books.

This, then, to drop a very protracted allegory, seems to be the proper training of the novelist: The achieving less of an aggressive faculty of research than of an attitude of mind—a receptivity, an acute sensitiveness. And this can be acquired.

But it can not be acquired by shutting one's self in one's closet, by a withdrawal from the world, and that, so it would appear, is just the mistake so many would-be fiction writers allow themselves. They would make the art of the novelist an aristocracy, a thing exclusive, to be guarded from contact with the vulgar, humdrum, bread-and-butter business of life, to be kept unspotted from the world, considering it the result of inspirations, of exaltations, of subtleties and—above all things—of refinement, a sort of velvet jacket affair, a studio hocus-pocus, a thing loved of women and of æsthetes.

What a folly! Of all the arts it is the most virile; of all the arts it will not, will not, will not flourish indoors. Dependent solely upon fidelity to life for existence, it must be practiced in the very

heart's heart of life, on the street corner, in the market-place, not in the studios. God enlighten us! It is not an affair of women and æsthetes, and the Muse of American fiction is no chaste, delicate, superfine mademoiselle of delicate poses and "elegant" attitudinizings, but a robust, red-armed *bonne femme,* who rough-shoulders her way among men and among affairs, who finds a healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob and a hearty delight in the honest, rough-and-tumble, Anglo-Saxon give-and-take knockabout that for us means life. Choose her, instead of the sallow, pale-faced statue-creature, with the foolish tablets and foolish, upturned eyes, and she will lead you as brave a march as ever drum tapped to. Stay at her elbow and obey her as she tells you to open your eyes and ears and heart, and as you go she will show things wonderful beyond wonder in this great, new, blessed country of ours, will show you a life untouched, untried, full of new blood and promise and vigor.

She is a Child of the People, this Muse of our Fiction of the future, and the wind of a new country, a new heaven and a new earth is in her face and has blown her hair from out the fillets that the Old World muse has bound across her brow, so that it is all in disarray. The tan of the sun is on her cheeks, and the dust of the highway is thick upon her buskin, and the elbowing of many men has torn the robe of her, and her hands are hard with the grip of many things. She is hail-fellow-well-met with every one she meets, unashamed to know the clown and unashamed to face the king, a hardy, vigorous girl, with an arm as strong as a man's and a heart as sensitive as a child's.

Believe me, she will lead you far from the studios and the æsthetes, the velvet jackets and the uncut hair, far from the sexless creatures who cultivate their little art of writing as the fancier cultivates his orchid. Tramping along, then, with a stride that will tax your best paces, she will lead you—if you are humble with her and honest with her—straight into a World of Working Men, crude of speech, swift of action, strong of passion, straight to the heart of a new life, on the borders of a new time, and there and there only will you learn to know the stuff of which must come the American fiction of the future.

A PLEA FOR ROMANTIC FICTION

Let us at the start make a distinction. Observe that one speaks of romanticism and not sentimentalism. One claims that the latter is as distinct from the former as is that other form of art which is called Realism. Romance has been often put upon and overburdened by being forced to bear the onus of abuse that by right should fall to sentiment: but the two should be kept very distinct, for a very high and illustrious place will be claimed for romance, while sentiment will be handed down the scullery stairs.

Many people to-day are composing mere sentimentalism, and calling it and causing it to be called romance; so with those who are too busy to think much upon these subjects, but who none the less love honest literature. Romance, too, has fallen into disrepute. Consider now the cut-and-thrust stories. They are all labeled Romances, and it is very easy to get the impression that Romance must be an affair of cloaks and daggers, or moonlight and golden hair. But this is not so at all. The true Romance is a more serious business than this. It is not merely a conjurer's trick-box full of flimsy quackeries, tinsel and claptraps, meant only to amuse, and relying upon deception to do even that. Is it not something better than this? Can we not see in it an instrument, keen, finely tempered, flawless—an instrument with which we may go straight through the clothes and tissues and wrappings of flesh down deep into the red, living heart of things?

Is all this too subtle, too merely speculative and intrinsic, too *precieuse* and nice and "literary"? Devoutly one hopes the contrary. So much is made of so-called Romanticism in present-day fiction that the subject seems worthy of discussion, and a protest against the misuse of a really noble and honest formula of literature appears to be timely—misuse, that is, in the sense of limited use. Let us suppose for the moment that a romance can be made out of a cut-and-thrust business. Good Heavens, are there no other things that are romantic, even in this—falsely, falsely called—humdrum world of to-day? Why should it be that so soon as the novelist addresses himself—seriously—to the consideration of con-

temporary life he must abandon Romance and take up the harsh, loveless, colorless, blunt tool called Realism?

Now, let us understand at once what is meant by Romance and what by Realism. Romance, I take it, is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely—as, for instance, the novels of M. Zola. (Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of the Romanticists.) Also, Realism, used as it sometimes is as a term of reproach, need not be in the remotest sense or degree offensive, but on the other hand respectable as a church and proper as a deacon—as, for instance, the novels of Mr. Howells.

The reason why one claims so much for Romance, and quarrels so pointedly with Realism, is that Realism stultifies itself. It notes only the surface of things. For it, Beauty is not even skin deep, but only a geometrical plane, without dimensions and depth, a mere outside. Realism is very excellent so far as it goes, but it goes no further than the Realist himself can actually see, or actually hear. Realism is minute; it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner. It is the visit to my neighbor's house, a formal visit, from which I may draw no conclusions. I see my neighbor and his friends—very, oh, such very! probable people—and that is all. Realism bows upon the doormat and goes away and says to me, as we link arms on the sidewalk: "That is life." And I say it is not. It is not, as you would very well see if you took Romance with you to call upon your neighbor.

Lately you have been taking Romance a weary journey across the water—ages and the flood of years—and haling her into the fuzzy, musty, worm-eaten, moth-riddled, rust-corroded "Grandes Salles" of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and she has found the drama of a bygone age for you there. But would you take her across the street to your neighbor's front parlor (with the bisque fisher-boy on the mantel and the photograph of Niagara Falls on glass hanging in the front window); would you introduce her there? Not you. Would you take a walk with her on Fifth Avenue, or Beacon Street, or Michigan Avenue? No, indeed. Would you choose her for a companion of a morning spent in Wall Street, or an afternoon in the Waldorf-Astoria? You just guess you would not.

She would be out of place, you say—inappropriate. She might be awkward in my neighbor's front parlor, and knock over the little bisque fisher-boy. Well, she might. If she did, you might find underneath the base of the statuette, hidden away, tucked away—what? God knows. But something that would be a complete revelation of my neighbor's secretest life.

So you think Romance would stop in the front parlor and discuss medicated flannels and mineral waters with the ladies! Not for more than five minutes. She would be off upstairs with you, prying, peeping, peering into the closets of the bedroom, into the nursery, into the sitting-room; yes, and into that little iron box screwed to the lower shelf of the closet in the library; and into those compartments and pigeon-holes of the *secretaire* in the study. She would find a heartache (maybe) between the pillows of the mistress's bed, and a memory carefully secreted in the master's deed-box. She would come upon a great hope amid the books and papers of the study-table of the young man's room, and—perhaps—who knows?—an affair, or, great Heavens, an intrigue, in the scented ribbons and gloves and hairpins of the young lady's bureau. And she would pick here a little and there a little, making up a bag of hopes and fears and a package of joys and sorrows—great ones, mind you—and then come down to the front door, and, stepping out into the street, hand you the bags and package and say to you—"That is Life!"

Romance does very well in the castles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance chateaux, and she has the *entrée* there and is very well received. That is all well and good. But let us protest against limiting her to such places and such times. You will find her, I grant you, in the chatelaine's chamber and the dungeon of the man-at-arms; but, if you choose to look for her, you will find her equally at home in the brownstone house on the corner and in the office building downtown. And this very day, in this very hour, she is sitting among the rags and wretchedness, the dirt and despair of the tenements of the East Side of New York.

"What?" I hear you say, "look for Romance—the lady of the silken robes and golden crown, our beautiful, chaste maiden of soft voice and gentle eyes—look for her among the vicious ruffians, male and female, of Allen Street and Mulberry Bend?" I tell you she is there, and to your shame be it said you will not know her in those surroundings. You, the aristocrats, who demand the fine linen and the purple in your fiction; you, the sensitive, the delicate,

who will associate with your Romance only so long as she wears a silken gown. You will not follow her to the slums, for you believe that Romance should only amuse and entertain you, singing you sweet songs and touching the harp of silver strings with rosy-tipped fingers. If haply she should call to you from the squalor of a dive, or the awful degradation of a disorderly house, crying: "Look! listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children! Look at them, know them and, knowing, help!" Should she call thus you would stop your ears; you would avert your eyes and you would answer, "Come from there, Romance. Your place is not there!" And you would make of her a harlequin, a tumbler, a sword-dancer, when, as a matter of fact, she should be by right divine a teacher sent from God.

She will not often wear the robe of silk, the golden crown, the jeweled shoon; will not always sweep the silver harp. An iron note is hers if so she choose, and coarse garments, and stained hands; and, meeting her thus, it is for you to know her as she passes—know her for the same young queen of the blue mantle and lilies. She can teach you if you will be humble to learn—teach you by showing. God help you if at last you take from Romance her mission of teaching; if you do not believe that she has a purpose—a nobler purpose and a mightier than mere amusement, mere entertainment. Let Realism do the entertainment with its meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall-paper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace.

But to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man. You, the indolent, must not always be amused. What matter the silken clothes, what matter the prince's houses? Romance, too, is a teacher, and if—throwing aside the purple—she wears the camel's-hair and feeds upon the locusts, it is to cry aloud unto the people, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight his path."

A PROBLEM IN FICTION

So many people—writers more especially—claim stridently and with a deal of gesturing that because a thing has happened it is therefore true. They have written a story, let us say, and they bring it to you to criticise. You lay your finger upon a certain passage and say "Not true to life." The author turns on you and then annihilates you—in his own mind—with the words, "But it actually happened." Of course, then, it must be true. On the contrary, it is accurate only.

For the assumption is, that truth is a higher power of accuracy—that the true thing includes the accurate; and, assuming this, the authors of novels—that are not successful—suppose that if they are accurate, if they tell the thing just as they saw it, that they are truthful. It is not difficult to show that a man may be as accurate as the spectroscope and yet lie like a Chinese diplomat. As, for instance: Let us suppose you have never seen a sheep, never heard of sheep, don't know sheep from shavings. It devolves upon me to enlighten your ignorance. I go out into the field and select from the flock a black sheep, bring it before you, and, with the animal there under our eyes, describe it in detail, faithfully, omitting nothing, falsifying nothing, exaggerating nothing. I am painfully accurate. But you go away with the untrue conviction that all sheep are black! I have been accurate, but I have not been true.

So it is with very, very many novels, written with all earnestness and seriousness. Every incident has happened in real life, and because it is picturesque, because it is romantic, because, in a word, it is like some other novel, it is seized upon at once, and serves as the nucleus of a tale. Then, because this tale fails of success, because it fails to impress, the author blames the public, not himself. He thinks he has gone to life for his material, and so must be original, new, and true. It is not so. Life itself is not always true; strange as it may seem, you may be able to say that life is not always true to life—from the point of view of the artist. It happened once that it was my unfortunate duty to tell a certain man of the violent

death of his only brother, whom he had left well and happy but an hour before. This is how he took it: He threw up both hands and staggered back, precisely as they do in melodrama, exclaiming all in a breath: "Oh, my God! This is terrible! What will mother say?" You may say what you please, this man was not true to life. From the point of view of the teller of tales he was theatrical, false, untrue, and though the incident was an actual fact and though the emotion was real, it had no value as "material," and no fiction writer in his senses would have thought of using it in his story.

Naturally enough it will be asked what, then, is the standard. How shall the writer guide himself in the treatment of a pivotal, critical scene, or how shall the reader judge whether or no he is true? Perhaps, after all, the word "seem," and not the word "true," is the most important. Of course no good novelist, no good artist, can represent life as it actually is. Nobody can, for nobody knows. Who is to say what life actually is? It seems easy—easy for us who have it and live in it and see it and hear it and feel it every millionth part of every second of the time. I say that life is actually this or that, and you say it is something else, and number three says "Lo! here," and number four says "Lo! there." Not even science is going to help you; no two photographs, even, will convey just the same impression of the same actuality; and here we are dealing not with science, but with art, that instantly involves the personality of the artist and all that that means. Even the same artist will not see the same thing twice exactly alike. His personality is one thing to-day and another thing to-morrow—is one thing before dinner and another thing after it. How, then, to determine what life actually is?

The point is just this. In the fine arts we do not care one little bit about what life actually is, but what it looks like to an interesting, impressionable man, and if he tells history or paints his picture so that the majority of intelligent people will say, "Yes, that must have been just about what would have happened under these circumstances," he is true. His accuracy cuts no figure at all. He need not be accurate if he does not choose to be. If he sees fit to be inaccurate in order to make his point—so only his point be the conveying of a truthful impression—that is his affair. We have nothing to do with that. Consider the study of a French cuirassier by Detaille; where the sunlight strikes the brown coat of the horse, you will see, if you look close, a mere smear of blue—light blue. This is inaccurate. The horse is not blue, nor has he any blue spots.

Stand at the proper distance and the blue smear resolves itself in the glossy reflection of the sun, and the effect is true.

And in fiction: Take the fine scene in "Ivanhoe," where Rebecca, looking from the window, describes the assault upon the outer walls of the castle to the wounded knight lying on the floor in the room behind her. If you stop and think, you will see that Rebecca never could have found such elaborate language under the stress of so great excitement—those cleverly managed little climaxes in each phrase, building up to the great climax of the paragraph, all the play of rhetoric, all the nice chain and adjustment of adjectives; she could not possibly have done it. Neither you nor I, nor any of us, with all the thought and time and labor at our command, could have ever written the passage. But is it not admirably true—true as the truth itself? It is not accurate: it is grossly, ludicrously inaccurate; but the fire and leap and vigor of it; there is where the truth is. Scott wanted you to get an impression of that assault on the barbican, and you do get it. You can hear those axes on the outer gate as plainly as Rebecca could; you can see the ladders go up, can hear them splinter, can see and feel and know all the rush and trample and smashing of that fine fight, with the Fetterlock Knight always to the fore, as no merely accurate description—accurate to five points of decimals—could ever present it.

So that one must remember the distinction, and claim no more for accuracy than it deserves—and that's but little. Anybody can be accurate—the man with the foot-rule is that. Accuracy is the attainment of small minds, the achievement of the commonplace, a mere machine-made thing that comes with niggardly research and ciphering and mensuration and the multiplication table, good in its place, so only the place is very small. In fiction it can under certain circumstances be dispensed with altogether. It is not a thing to be striven for. To be true is the all-important business, and, once attaining that, "all other things shall be added unto you." Paint the horse pea-green if it suits your purpose; fill the mouth of Rebecca with gasconades and rodomontades interminable: these things do not matter. It is truth that matters, and the point is whether the daubs of pea-green will look like horseflesh and the mouth-filling words create the impression of actual battle.

WHY WOMEN SHOULD WRITE THE BEST NOVELS

It is rather curious upon reflection and upon looking over the rank and file of achievement during the period of recorded history, to observe that of all the occupations at first exclusively followed by men, that of writing has been—in all civilizations and among all people—one of the very first to be successfully—mark the qualification of the adverb—to be successfully invaded by women. We hear of women who write poetry long before we hear of women who paint pictures or perform upon musical instruments or achieve distinction upon the stage.

It would seem as if, of all the arts, that of writing is the one to which women turn the quickest. Great success in the sciences or in mercantile pursuits is, of course, out of the question, so that—as at the first—it may be said, speaking largely, that of all the masculine occupations, that of writing is the first to be adopted by women.

If it is the first it must be because it is the easiest. Now to go very far back to the earliest beginnings, all occupations, whether artistic or otherwise, were the prerogative of the male; considering this fact, I say, does it not follow, or would not the inference be strong, that—given an equal start—women would write more readily than men, would do so because they could do so; that writing is a feminine—not accomplishment merely—but gift?

So that the whole matter leads up to the point one wishes to make, namely, that here, in our present day and time, it should be easier for women to write well than for men. And as writing today means the writing of fiction, we arrive, somewhat deviously and perhaps—after jumping many gaps and weak spots en route—a little lamely, at the very last result of all, which is this: Women should be able to write better novels than men.

But under modern conditions there are many more reasons for this success of women in fiction than merely a natural inherent gift of expression.

One great reason is leisure. The average man, who must work for a living, has no time to write novels, much less to get into that

frame of mind or to assume that mental attitude by means of which he is able to see possibilities for fictitious narrative in the life around him. But, as yet, few women (compared with the armies of male workers) have to work for a living, and it is an unusual state of affairs in which the average woman of moderate circumstances could not, if she would, take from three to four hours a day from her household duties to devote to any occupation she deemed desirable.

Another reason is found, one believes, in the nature of women's education. From almost the very first the young man studies with an eye to business or to a profession. In many State colleges nowadays all literary courses except the most elementary—which, indeed, have no place in collegiate curriculums—are optional. But what girls' seminary does not prescribe the study of literature through all its three or four years, making of this study a matter of all importance? And while the courses of literature do not, by any manner of means, make a novelist, they familiarize the student with style and the means by which words are put together. The more one reads the easier one writes.

Then, too (though this reason lies not so much in modern conditions as in basic principles), there is the matter of temperament. The average man is a rectangular, square-cut, matter-of-fact, sober-minded animal who does not receive impressions easily, who is not troubled with emotions and has no overmastering desire to communicate his sensations to anybody. But the average woman is just the reverse of all these. She is impressionable, emotional, and communicative. And impressionableness, emotionality, and communicativeness are three very important qualities of mind that make for novel writing.

The modern woman, then, in a greater degree than her contemporaneous male, has the leisure for novel writing, has the education and has the temperament. She should be able to write better novels, and as a matter of fact she does not. It is, of course, a conceded fact that there have been more great men novelists than women novelists, and that to-day the producers of the best fiction are men and not women. There are probably more women trying to write novels than there are men, but for all this it must be admitted that the ranks of the "arrived" are recruited from the razor contingent.

Why, then, with such a long start and with so many advantages of temperament, opportunity, and training, should it be that women do not write better novels than men?

One believes that the answer is found in the fact that life is more important than literature, and in the wise, wise, old, old adage that experience is the best teacher. Of all the difficult things that enter into the learning of a most difficult profession, the most difficult of all for the intended novelist to acquire is the fact that life is better than literature. The amateur will say this with conviction, will preach it in public and practice the exact reverse in private. But it still remains true that all the temperament, all the sensitiveness to impressions, all the education in the world will not help one little, little bit in the writing of the novel if life itself, the crude, the raw, the vulgar, if you will, is not studied. An hour's experience is worth ten years of study—of reading other people's books. But this fact is ignored, and the future writer of what it is hoped will be the great novel of his day and age studies the thoughts and products of some other writer, of some other great novel, of some other day and age, in the hope that thereby much may be learned. And much will be learned—very much, indeed—of the methods of construction; and if the tyro only has wits enough to study the great man's formula, well and good. But the fascination of a great story-writer—especially upon the young, untried little story-writer—is strong, and before the latter is well aware he is taking from the big man that which he has no right to take. He is taking his code of ethics, his view of life, his personality, even to the very incidents and episodes of his story. He is studying literature and not life.

If he had gone direct to life itself, all would have been different. He would have developed in his own code, his own personality, and he would have found incidents and episodes that were new—yes, and strikingly forceful, better than any he could have imagined or stolen, and which were all his own. In the end, if the gods gave him long life and a faculty of application, he would have evolved into something of a writer of fiction.

All this digression is to try to state the importance of actual life and actual experience, and it bears upon the subject in hand in this, that women who have all the other qualifications of good novelists are, because of nature and character that invariably goes with these qualifications, shut away from the study of, and the association with, the most important thing of all for them—real life. Even making allowances for the emancipation of the New Woman, the majority of women still lead, in comparison with men, secluded lives. The woman who is impressionable is by reason of this very thing sensitive (indeed, sensitiveness and impressionableness mean

almost the same thing), and it is inconceivably hard for the sensitive woman to force herself into the midst of that great, grim complication of men's doings that we call life. And even admitting that she finds in herself the courage to do this, she lacks the knowledge to use knowledge thus gained. The faculty of selection comes even to men only after many years of experience.

So much for causes exterior to herself, and it is well to admit at once that the exterior causes are by far the most potent and the most important; but there are perhaps causes to be found in the make-up of the woman herself which keep her from success in fiction. Is it not a fact that protracted labor of the mind tells upon a woman quicker than upon a man? Be it understood that no disparagement, no invidious comparison, is intended. Indeed, it is quite possible that her speedier mental fatigue is due to the fact that the woman possesses the more highly specialized organ.

A man may grind on steadily for an almost indefinite period, when a woman at the same task would begin, after a certain point, to "feel her nerves," to chafe, to fret, to try to do too much, to polish too highly, to develop more perfectly. Then come fatigue, harassing doubts, more nerves, a touch of hysteria occasionally, exhaustion, and in the end complete discouragement and a final abandonment of the enterprise: and who shall say how many good, even great, novels have remained half written, to be burned in the end, because their women authors mistook lack of physical strength for lack of genuine ability?

SIMPLICITY IN ART

Once upon a time I had occasion to buy so uninteresting a thing as a silver soup-ladle. The salesman at the silversmith's was obliging and for my inspection brought forth quite an array of ladles. But my purse was flaccid, anæmic, and I must pick and choose with all the discrimination in the world. I wanted to make a brave showing with my gift—to get a great deal for my money. I went through a world of soup-ladles—ladles with gilded bowls, with embossed handles, with chased arabesques, but there were none to my taste. "Or perhaps," says the salesman, "you would care to look at something like this," and he brought out a ladle that was as plain and as unadorned as the unclouded sky—and about as beautiful. Of all the others this was the most to my liking. But the price! ah, that anæmic purse; and I must put it from me! It was nearly double the cost of any of the rest. And when I asked why, the salesman said:

"You see, in this highly ornamental ware the flaws of the material don't show, and you can cover up a blow-hole or the like by wreaths and beading. But this plain ware has got to be the very best. Every defect is apparent."

And there, if you please, is a conclusive comment upon the whole business—a final basis of comparison of all things, whether commercial or artistic; the bare dignity of the unadorned that may stand before the world all unshamed, panoplied rather than clothed in the consciousness of perfection. We of this latter day, we painters and poets and writers—artists—must labor with all the wits of us, all the strength of us, and with all that we have of ingenuity and perseverance to attain simplicity. But it has not always been so. At the very earlist, men—forgotten, ordinary men—were born with an easy, unblurred vision that to-day we would hail as marvelous genius. Suppose, for instance, the New Testament was all unwritten and one of us were called upon to tell the world that Christ was born, to tell of how he had seen Him, that this was the Messiah. How the adjectives would marshal upon the page, how the exclamatory phrases would cry out, how we would

elaborate and elaborate, and how our rhetoric would flare and blazon till—so we should imagine—the ear would ring and the very eye would be dazzled; and even then we would believe that our words were all so few and feeble. It is beyond words, we should vociferate. So it would be. That is very true—words of ours. Can you not see how we should dramatize it? We would make a point of the transcendent stillness of the hour, of the deep blue of the Judean midnight, of the lip-lapping of Galilee, the murmur of Jordan, the peacefulness of sleeping Jerusalem. Then the stars, the descent of the angel, the shepherds—all the accessories. And our narrative would be as commensurate with the subject as the flippant smartness of a "bright" reporter in the Sistine chapel. We would be striving to cover up our innate incompetence, our impotence to do justice to the mighty theme by elaborateness of design and arabesque intricacy of rhetoric.

But on the other hand—listen:

"The days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Simplicity could go no further. Absolutely not one word unessential, not a single adjective that is not merely descriptive. The whole matter stated with the terseness of a military report, and yet —there is the epic, the world epic, beautiful, majestic, incomparably dignified, and no ready writer, no Milton nor Shakespeare, with all the wealth of their vocabularies, with all the resources of their genius, with all their power of simile or metaphor, their pomp of eloquence or their royal pageantry of hexameters, could produce the effect contained in these two simple declarative sentences.

The mistake that we little people are so prone to make is this: that the more intense the emotional quality of the scene described, the more "vivid," the more exalted, the more richly colored we suppose should be the language.

When the crisis of the tale is reached there is where we like the author to spread himself, to show the effectiveness of his treatment. But if we would only pause to take a moment's thought we must surely see that the simplest, even the barest statement of fact is not only all-sufficient, but all-appropriate.

Elaborate phrase, rhetoric, the intimacy of metaphor and allegory and simile is forgivable for the unimportant episodes where the interest of the narrative is languid; where we are willing to

watch the author's ingenuity in the matter of scrolls and fretwork and mosaics—rococo work. But when the catastrophe comes, when the narrative swings clear upon its pivot and we are lifted with it from out the world of our surroundings, we want to forget the author. We want no adjectives to blur our substantives. The substantives may now speak for themselves. We want no metaphor, no simile to make clear the matter. If at this moment of drama and intensity the matter is not of itself pre-eminently clear no verbiage, however ingenious, will clarify it. Heighten the effect. Does exclamation and heroics on the part of the bystanders ever make the curbstone drama more poignant? Who would care to see Niagara through colored fire and calcium lights?

The simple treatment, whether of a piece of silversmith work or of a momentous religious epic, is always the most difficult of all. It demands more of the artist. The unskilful story-teller as often as not tells the story to himself as well as to his hearers as he goes along. Not sure of exactly how he is to reach the end, not sure even of the end itself, he must feel his way from incident to incident, from page to page, fumbling, using many words, repeating himself. To hide the confusion there is one resource—elaboration, exaggerated outline, violent color, till at last the unstable outline disappears under the accumulation, and the reader is to be so dazzled with the wit of the dialogue, the smartness of the repartee, the felicity of the diction, that he will not see the gaps and lapses in the structure itself—just as the "nobby" drummer wears a wide and showy scarf to conceal a soiled shirt-bosom.

But in the master-works of narrative there is none of this shamming, no shoddyism, no humbug. There is little more than bare outline, but in the care with which it is drawn, how much thought, what infinite pains go to the making of each stroke, so that when it is made it falls just at the right place and exactly in its right sequence. This attained, what need is there for more? Comment is superfluous. If the author make the scene appear terrible to the reader he need not say in himself or in the mouth of some protagonist, "It is terrible!" If the picture is pathetic so that he who reads must weep, how superfluous, how intrusive should the author exclaim, "It was pitiful to the point of tears." If beautiful, we do not want him to tell us so. We want him to make it beautiful and our own appreciation will supply the adjectives.

Beauty, the ultimate philosophical beauty, is not a thing of elaboration, but on the contrary of an almost barren nudity: a jewel

may be an exquisite gem, a woman may have a beautiful arm, but the bracelet does not make the arm more beautiful, nor the arm the bracelet. One must admire them separately, and the moment that the jewel ceases to have a value or a reason upon the arm it is better in the case, where it may enjoy an undivided attention.

But after so many hundreds of years of art and artists, of civilization and progress, we have got so far away from the sane old homely uncomplex way of looking out at the world that the simple things no longer charm, and the simple declarative sentence, straightforward, plain, seems flat to our intellectual palate—flat and tasteless and crude.

What we would now call simple our forebears would look upon as a farrago of gimcrackery, and all our art—the art of the better-minded of us—is only a striving to get back to the unblurred, direct simplicity of those writers who could see that the Wonderful, the Counselor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace, could be laid in a manger and yet be the Saviour of the world.

It is this same spirit, this disdaining of simplicity that has so warped and inflated The First Story, making of it a pomp, an affair of gold-embroidered vestments and costly choirs, of marbles, of jeweled windows and of incense, unable to find the thrill as formerly in the plain and humble stable, and the brown-haired, grave-eyed peasant girl, with her little baby; unable to see the beauty in the crumbling mud walls, the low-ceiled interior, where the only incense was the sweet smell of the cow's breath, the only vestments the swaddling clothes, rough, coarse-fibred, from the hand-looms of Nazareth, the only pomp the scanty gifts of three old men, and the only chanting the crooning of a young mother holding her first-born babe upon her breast.

SALT AND SINCERITY

I

If the signs of the times may be read aright, and the future forecasted, the volume of short stories is in a fair way of becoming a "rare book." Fewer and fewer of this kind of literature are published every year, and only within the last week one of the foremost of the New York publishers has said that, so far as the material success was concerned, he would prefer to undertake a book of poems rather than a book of stories. Also he explains why. And this is the interesting thing. One has always been puzzled to account for this lapse from a former popularity of a style of fiction certainly legitimate and incontestably entertaining. The publisher in question cites the cheap magazines—the monthlies and weeklies—as the inimical factors. The people go to them for their short stories, not to the cloth-bound volumes for sale at a dollar or a dollar and a half. Why not, if the cheap magazines give "just as good"? Often, too, they give the very same stories which, later, are republished in book form. As the case stands now, any fairly diligent reader of two or three of the more important monthlies and weeklies may anticipate the contents of the entire volume, and very naturally he can not be expected to pay a dollar for something he already has.

Or even suppose—as is now generally demanded by the publisher—the author adds to the forthcoming collection certain hitherto unpublished stories. Even this does not tempt the buyer. Turning over the leaves at the bookseller's, he sees two, three, five, half a dozen familiar titles. "Come," says he, "I have read three-fourths of this book already. I have no use for it."

It is quite possible that this state of affairs will produce important results. It is yet, perhaps, too soon to say, but it is not outside the range of the probable that, in America at least, it will, in time to come, engender a decay in the quality of the short story. It may be urged that the high prices paid by periodicals to the important short-story writers—the best men—will still act as a stimulus to production. But this does not follow by any means.

Authors are queer cattle. They do not always work for money, but sometimes for a permanent place in the eyes of the world. Books give them this—not fugitive short stories published here and there, and at irregular intervals. Reputations that have been made by short stories published in periodicals may be counted upon the fingers of one hand. The "life of a novel"—to use a trade term—is to a certain extent indeterminable. The life of a short story, be it never so excellent, is prolonged only till the next issue of the periodical in which it has appeared. If the periodical is a weekly it will last a week, if a monthly a month—*and not a day more.* If very good, it will create a demand for another short story by the same author, but that one particular contribution, the original one, is irretrievably and hopelessly dead.

If the author is in literature "for his own pocket every time," he is generally willing to accept the place of a short-story writer. If he is one of the "best men," working for a "permanent place," he will turn his attention and time, his best efforts, to the writing of novels, reverting to the short story only when necessary for the sake of boiling the Pot and chasing the Wolf. He will abandon the field to the inferior men, or enter it only to dispose of "copy" which does not represent him at his best. And, as a result, the quality of the short story will decline more and more.

So, "taking one consideration with another," it may be appropriate to inquire if it is not possible that the American short story is liable to decline in quality and standard of excellence.

And now comes again this question addressed to certain authors, "Which book do you consider your best?" and a very industrious and painstaking person is giving the answer to the world.

To what end it is difficult to see. Who cares which of the "Waverleys" Sir Walter thought his best? or which of the Rougon-Maquart M. Zola favors the most? The author's point of view is very different from yours—the reader's. Which one do *you* think the best? That's the point. Do you not see that in the author's opinion the novel he is working on at the moment, or which is in press and about to appear—in fine, the last one written—is for a very long time the best he has done? He would be a very poor kind of novelist if he did not think that.

And even in retrospect his opinion as to "his best book" is not necessarily final. For he will see good points in "unsuccessful" novels that the public and critics have never and will never discover; and also defects in what the world considers his masterpiece that for him

spoil the entire story. His best novel is, as was said, the last he has written, or—and this more especially—the one he is *going* to write. For to a certain extent this is true of every author, whether fiction writer or not. *Though he very often does better than he thinks he can, he never does so well as he knows he might.*

His best book is the one that he never quite succeeds in getting hold of firmly enough to commit to paper. It is always just beyond him. Next year he is going to think it out, or the next after that, and instead he compromises on something else, and his *chief d'œuvre* is always a little ahead of him. If this, too, were not so, he would be a poor kind of writer. So that it seems to me the most truthful answer to the question, "What is your best book?" would be, "The one I shall never write."

Another ideal that such of the "people who imagine a vain thing" have long been pursuing is an English Academy of letters, and now that "the British Academy for the promotion of Historical, Philosophical and Philological studies" has been proposed, the old discussion is revived, and especially in England there is talk of a British Academy, something on the same lines as the *Académie Française*, which shall tend to promote and reward particularly the production of good fiction. In a word, it would be a distinction reserved only for the worthy, a charmed circle that would open only to the élite upon the vote of those already admitted. The proposition strikes one as pre-eminently ridiculous. Literature is of all arts the most democratic; it is of, by and for the people in a fuller measure than even government itself. And one makes the assertion without forgetting that fine mouth-filling phrase, the "aristocracy of letters." The survival of the fittest is as good in the evolution of our literature as of our bodies, and the best "academy" for the writers of the United States is, after all, and in the last analysis, to be found in the judgment of the people, exercised throughout the lapse of a considerable time. For, give the people time enough, and they will always decide justly.

It was in connection with this talk about an "Academy" that Mr. Hall Caine made the remark that "no academic study of a thing so variable, emotional and independent as the imaginative writer's art could be anything but mischievous." One is inclined to take exception to the statement. Why should the academic study of the principles of writing fiction be mischievous? Is it not possible to codify in some way the art of *construction* of novels so that they may be studied to advantage? This has, of course, never been

done. But one believes that, if managed carefully and with a proper disregard of "set forms" and hampering conventions, it would be possible to start and maintain a school of fiction-writing in the most liberal sense of the word "school." Why should it be any more absurd than the painting schools and music schools? Is the art of music, say, any less variable, less emotional, less independent, less imaginative, than the fiction writer's? Heretical as the assertion may appear, one is thoroughly convinced that the art of novel writing (up to a certain point, *bien entendu*) can be acquired by instruction just as readily and with results just as satisfactory and practical as the arts of painting, sculpture, music, and the like. The art of fiction is, in general, based upon four qualities of mind: observation, imagination, invention and sympathy. Certainly the first two are "acquired characters." Kindergarten children the world over are acquiring them every day. Invention is immensely stimulated by observation and imagination, while sympathy is so universally a fundamental quality with all sorts and conditions of men and women—especially the latter—that it needs but little cultivation. Why, then, would it be impossible for a few of our older, more seriously minded novelists to launch a School of Instruction in the Art of Composition—just as Bouguereau, Lefevre, Boulanger and Tony Robert Fleury founded Julien's in Paris?

At present the stimulus to, and even the manner of, production of very much of American fiction is in the hands of the publishers. No one not intimately associated with any one of the larger, more important "houses" can have any idea of the influence of the publisher upon latter-day fiction. More novels are written—practically—to order than the public has any notion of. The publisher again and again picks out the man (one speaks, of course, of the younger generation), suggests the theme, and exercises, in a sense, all the functions of instructor during the period of composition. In the matter of this "picking out of the man" it is rather curious to note a very radical change that has come about in the last five years. Time was when the publisher waited for the unknown writer to come to him with his manuscript. But of late the Unknown has so frequently developed, under exploitation and by direct solicitation of the publisher, into a "money-making proposition" of such formidable proportions that there is hardly a publishing house that does not now hunt him out with all the resources at its command. Certain fields are worked with the thorough-

ness, almost, of a political canvass, and if a given State—as, for instance, Indiana—has suddenly evolved into a region of great literary activity, it is open to suspicion that it is not because there is any inherent literary quality in the people of the place greater than in other States, but that certain firms of publishers are "working the ground."

It might not have been altogether out of place if upon the Victor Hugo monument which has just been unveiled in Paris there had been inscribed this, one of the most important of the great Frenchman's maxims:

"Les livres n'ont jamais faites du mal;"

and I think that in the last analysis, this is the most fitting answer to Mr. Carnegie, who, in his address before the Authors Club, put himself on record as willing to exclude from the libraries he is founding all books not three years old. No doubt bad books have a bad influence, but bad books are certainly better than no books at all. For one must remember that the worst books are not printed —the really tawdry, really pernicious, really evil books. These are throttled in manuscript by the publishers, who must be in a sense public censors. No book, be assured, goes to press but that there is—oh, hidden away like a grain of mustard—some bit, some modicum, some tiny kernel of good in it. Perhaps it is not that seed of goodness that the cultured, the fastidious care much about. Perhaps the discriminating would call it a platitude. But one is willing to believe that somewhere, somehow, this atom of real worth makes itself felt—and that's a beginning. It will create after a while a taste for reading. And a taste for reading is a more important factor in a nation's literary life than the birth of a second Shakespeare.

It is the people, after all, who "make a literature." If they read, the few, the "illuminati," will write. But first must come the demand—come from the people, the Plain People, the condemned *bourgeoisie*. The select circles of the élite, the "studio" hangers-on, the refined, will never, never, clamor they never so loudly, toil they never so painfully, produce the Great Writer. The demand which he is to supply comes from the Plain People—from the masses, and not from the classes. There is more significance as to the ultimate excellence of American letters in the sight of the messenger boy devouring his "Old Sleuths" and "Deadwood Dicks" and "Boy Detectives," with an *earnest, serious* absorption, than in the

spectacle of a "reading circle" of dilettanti coquetting with Verlaine and *pretending* that they understand.

By the same token, then, is it not better to welcome and rejoice over this recent "literary deluge" than to decry it? One is not sure it is not a matter for self-gratulation—not a thing to deplore and vilify. The "people" are reading, that is the point; it is *not* the point that immature, untrained writers are flooding the counters with their productions. The more the Plain People read the more they will discriminate. It is inevitable, and by and by they will demand "something better." It is impossible to read a book without formulating an opinion upon it. Even the messenger boy can tell you that, in *his* judgment, No. 3,666, "The James Boys Brought to Bay," is more or less—as the case may be—exciting than No. 3,667, "The Last of the Fly-by-Nights." Well, that is something. Is it not better than that the same boy should be shooting craps around the corner? Take his dime novel from him, put him in the "No Book" condition—and believe me, he will revert to the craps. And so it is higher up the scale. In the name of American literature, let the Plain People read, anything—anything, whether it is three days or three years old. Mr. Carnegie will not educate the public taste by shutting his libraries upon recent fiction. The public taste will educate itself by *much* reading, not by *restricted* reading. "Books have never done harm," Victor Hugo said it, and a bad book—that is to say, a poor, cheap, ill-written, "trashy" book—is not after all so harmful as "no book" at all.

Later on, when the people have learned discrimination by much reading, it will not be necessary to bar fiction not three years old from the libraries, for by then the people will demand the "something better," and the writers will have to supply it—or disappear, giving place to those who can, and *then* the literary standards will be raised.

II

In a recent number of his periodical, the editor of "Harper's Weekly" prints a letter received from a gentleman who deplores the fact that the participants in the Harvard-Yale track teams are given a great place in the daily newspapers while—by implication—his son, an arduous student and winner of a "Townsend prize," is completely and definitely ignored. "I could not but think of my son," writes the gentleman, "a Yale Senior who, as one of the results of nine years' devotion to study, won a Townsend prize." One will ask the reader to consider this last statement. The publicity of the college athletes is not the point here. The point is "nine years' devotion to study" and—"a Townsend prize." Nine years—think of it—the best, the most important of a boy's life given to devoted study!—not of Men, not of Life, not of Realities, but of the books of Other People, mere fatuous, unreasoned, pig-headed absorption of ideas at second hand. And the result? Not a well-ordered mind, not a well-regulated reasoning machine, not a power of appreciation, not an ability to create. None of these, but—Great Heavens!—a *Townsend Prize*, a rectangular piece of the skin of a goat, dried and cured and marked with certain signs and symbols by means of a black pigment; this and a disk of the same metal the Uganda warrior hangs in his ears. A Townsend Prize. And for this a young American living in the twentieth century, sane, intelligent, healthful, has pored over Other People's books, has absorbed Other People's notions, has wearied his brain, has weakened his body, has shut himself from the wide world, has denied himself, has restrained himself, has stultified emotion, has in a word buried his talent in the earth wrapped carefully in a napkin. "And," comments the editor, "the boy who won the Townsend prize for scholarship, if he keeps on, will some day be honored by his fellow-men, when the athletic prize-winner, if he does nothing else, will be a director of a gymnasium. The serious worker comes out ahead every time." But winning Townsend prizes by nine years of study is, we submit, not serious work, but serious misuse of most valuable time and energy. Scholarship? Will we never

learn that times change and that sauce for the Renaissance goose is *not* sauce for the New Century gander? It is a fine thing, this scholarship, no doubt; but if a man be content with merely this his scholarship is of as much use and benefit to his contemporaries as his deftness in manicuring his finger nails. The United States in this year of grace nineteen hundred and two does not want and does not need Scholars, but Men—Men made in the mold of the Leonard Woods and the Theodore Roosevelts, Men such as Colonel Waring, Men such as Booker Washington. The most brilliant scholarship attainable by human effort is not, to-day, worth nine years of any young man's life. I think it is Nathaniel Hawthorne who tells the story of a "scholar" who one day, when a young man, found the tooth of a mammoth. He was a student of fossil remains, and in his enthusiasm set out to complete the skeleton. His mind filled with this one idea, to the exclusion of all else, he traveled up and down the world, year after year, picking up here a vertebra, here a femur, here a rib, here a clavicle. Years passed; he came to be an old man; at last he faced death. He had succeeded. The monstrous framework was complete. But he looked back upon the sixty years of his toil and saw that it was a vanity. He had to show for his life-work—the skeleton of a mammoth. And, believe this implicity: if—as the editor and commentator remarks—the Townsend prize-winner *keeps* on, this will be the result, a huge thing no doubt, a thing that looms big in the eye and in the imagination, but an empty thing, lifeless, bloodless, dead; yes, and more than dead—extinct; a mere accumulation of dry bones, propped up lest it fall to the ground, a thing for the wind to blow through and the vulgar to gape at.

But in connection with this subject one may cite so high an authority as Doctor Patton of Princeton, who has recently said that nowadays men do not go to colleges to become scholars, and that it was time and money wasted to try to make them such. This is a good saying and should be taken to heart by every college faculty between the oceans. Sooner or later there is bound to come a fundamental change in the mode of instruction now in favor in most American colleges. The times demand it; the character of the student body, the character of the undergraduate, is changing. One chooses to believe that the college of the end of the present century will be an institution where only specialized work will be indulged in. There will be courses in engineering, in electricity, in agriculture, in law, in chemistry, in biology, in mining,

etc., and the so-called general "literary" or "classical" courses will be relegated to the limbo of Things No Longer Useful. Any instructor in collegiate work will tell you to-day that the men in the special courses are almost invariably the hardest, steadiest, most serious workers. The man who studes law at college finishes his work a lawyer, he who studies engineering ends an engineer, the student of biology graduates a biologist, the student of chemistry a chemist. But the student in the "literary" course does not—no, not once in a thousand instances—graduate a literary man. He spends the four years of his life over a little Greek, a little Latin, a little mathematics, a little literature, a little history, a little "theme" writing, and comes out—just what it would be difficult to say. But he has in most cases acquired a very profound distaste for the authors whose work he has studied in class and lecture-room. Great names such as those of Carlyle, Macaulay, and De Quincey are associated in his mind only with tedium. He never will go back to these books, never read with enjoyment what once was "work." Even his conscientiousness—supposing him to be animated with such a motive—will trap him and trick him. I do not think that I shall ever forget the spectacle and impression of a student in my own Alma Mater—a little lass of seventeen (the college was co-educational), with her hair still down her back and her shoes yet innocent of heels, rising in her place in the classroom to read before a half-hundred of raw boys and undeveloped girls—not three months out of the high school—a solemn and quite unintelligible "theme" on "The Insincerity of Thomas Babington Macaulay."

Just at the time of the present writing a controversy has been started in London literary circles as to the legitimacy of a reviewer publishing the whole or parts of the same unsigned article in two or more periodicals. Mr. Arthur Symons is the reviewer under fire, and his article a *critique* of the dramas of Mr. Stephen Phillips. It was Mr. Phillips, so we are told, who first started the protest, and he has found followers and champions. And on first consideration there does seem to be ground for complaint here. It has been assumed that the first publisher of the article has a right to expect that for the money he pays to the writer this latter shall give to him all he has to say upon the subject. If he has very much to say—enough for another article—is it not the duty of the scribe to condense and compact so that the matter may be represented as a unit and not as a fragment? Moreover, does it seem fair to Mr. Phillips that three reviews—as was the case—all unfavorable, should ap-

pear in as many publications, thus giving to the public the impression that a *group* of critics, instead of merely one, was hostile to his work? Lastly, it has been urged that it is not honest to sell a thing twice—that if a horse has been sold by A to B, A can not sell it again to C.

But none of the objections seems valid. If the space allotted to the article in the paper is not sufficient, that is the fault of the editor, not the writer. The editor pays only for what he prints: the surplusage is still the author's property and can be by him disposed of as such. As for the public considering the single—unfavorable—review as the opinions of three men, and as such unfair to Mr. Phillips, this as well is inadequate and incompetent. Another critic, reviewing Mr. Phillips *favorably*, is just as much at libery to split up his work as the adverse reviewer. Last of all, it *is* under certain circumstances perfectly honest to sell the same thing twice. Articles, stories, poems and the like are continually syndicated in hundreds of newspapers simultaneously, and in this sense are sold over and over again. The analogy between the sale of a horse and the sale of a bit of literature is quite misleading. For the matter of that, the writer does not sell the actual concrete *manuscript* of his work, but merely the right to print it, and unless the word "exclusively" is understood in the agreement he is in no wise bound. The writer is not selling his copy as the owner sells his horse. The analogy would be true if A sold to B the *use* of the horse. When B had got the "use" out of the animal no one will deny the right of A to sell the same "use" to C, D, E, and so on through the whole alphabet. The reviewer of books has a hard enough time of it as it is. It is only fair to give him the same freedom as a livery stable keeper.

It has often occurred to me as a thing of some importance and certain significance that all great travelers are great writers. And the fact is so well established, the effect flows so invariably from the cause, that there would seem to be here a matter for reflection. One affirms and will maintain that the one is the direct result of the other, that the faculty of adequate expression, of vivid presentation, of forceful and harmonious grouping of words, is engendered and stimulated and perfected by wide journeying.

This is not at all an orthodox view, not at all the theory cherished by our forebears. The writer, according to unvarying belief, is the man of the closet, the bookish man, a student, a sedentary, a consumer of kerosene, a reader rather than a rover. And the idea

is plausible. The nomad, he without local habitation, has no leisure, no opportunity, nor even actual concrete place to write. Would it not seem that literature is the quiet art, demanding an unperturbed mind, an unexcited, calm, reposeful temperament? This is a very defensible position, but it is based upon a foundation of sand. It assumes that the brain of the writer is a jar full of a precious fluid —a bottle full of wine to be poured out with care and with a hand so quiet, so restful and unshaken that not a drop be spilled. Very well. But when the jar, when the bottle is emptied—then what? Believe me, the gods give but one vintage to one man. There will be no refilling of the vessel; and even the lees are very flat, be the wine ever so good. The better the grape, the bitterer the dregs; and the outpouring of the "best that is in you" in the end will be soured by that brackish, *fade* sediment that follows upon lavish expenditure, so that the man ends ignobly and because of exhaustion and depletion, with all the product of his early and mature richness making more prominent and pitiful the final poverty and tenuity of his outgiving—ends the butt of critics, the compassion of the incompetent, a shard kicked of every scullion.

And in all the world there is nothing more lamentable than this —the end of a man once strong who has used himself up, but who decants lees and not wine. Even when the lees are spent he absorbs them once more and once more gives them forth, each time a little staler, a little thinner, a little feebler, realizing his exhaustion, yet—urged by some whip of fortune—forced to continue the miserable performance till the golden bowl be broken and the pitcher shattered at the fountain.

But suppose the productive power of the writer be considered not as a golden bowl to be emptied and in the end broken, but as a silver cord of finest temper that only needs to be kept in tune. True, the cord may be stretched to the breaking point. But its end comes at the very height and in the very consummate fulness of its capacity, and oh, the grand world-girdling Note that it sends forth in the breaking!—the very soul of it at mightiest tension, the very spirit of it at fiercest strain. What matter the loosening or the snapping when so noble an *Amen* as that vibrates through the nations to sound at once the Height and the End of an entire Life—a whole existence concentrated into a single cry!

Or it may become out of tune. But this is no great matter, because so easily remedied. The golden bowl once emptied there will be no refilling, but by some blessed provision of heaven nothing is

easier than to attune the cords of being which are also the cords—the silver singing cords—of expression.

But—and here we come around once more to the *point de depart*—the silver cords once gone *discordant*, once jaded and slack, will not, can not be brought again to harmony in the closet, in the study, in the seclusion of the cabinet. Tinker them never so cunningly, never so delicately, they will *not* ring true for you. Thought will avail nothing, nor even rest, nor even relaxation. Of one's self, one can not cause the Master-note to which they will respond to vibrate. The cords have been played on too much. For all your pottering they will yet remain a little loose, and so long as they are loose the deftest fingering, the most skilful touch, will produce only false music.

And the deadly peril is that the cords of Life and the cords of expression lie so close together, are so intricately mingled, that the man can not always tell that the cords of expression are singing out of tune. Life and expression are two parts of the same instrument. If the whole life be out of tune, how can the man distinguish the false music from the true? There is a danger here, but it is not great. Sooner or later the conviction comes that the productive power is menaced. A little frankness with one's self, a little uncompromising testing of the strings, and the dissonance begins to impress itself.

And—as was said—the remedy is not to be found by the taking of thought, but by a heroic, drastic thrusting out from the grooves and cogs of the life of other men—of the life of the city and the comfortable stay-at-home, hour-to-hour humdrum, and a determined journeying out into the great wide world itself.

The further afield the better. The Master-note will not be heard within "commuting distance of the city." The whir of civilization smothers it. The click of the telegraph, the hiss of steam and the clatter of the printing-press drown it out. It is not always and of necessity a loud note. Though Nansen heard it in the thunder of the pack-ice of the Furthest North, it came to the ear of Stevenson in the lap of lazy wavelets in the hushed noonday of a South Sea strand.

Travel is the only way. Travel in any direction, by any means, so only it be far—very, very far—is the great attuner of the listless cords of the writer's instrument. For again and again and again his power is *not* a bowl to be emptied, but an instrument to be

played on. To be of use it *must* be sensitive and responsive and true. And to be kept sensitive and responsive and true it must go once in so often to the great Tuner—to Nature.

We speak of the Mountains, the Rivers, Deserts and Oceans as though we knew them. We know the Adirondacks from a fortnight in a "summer camp"; the Rivers and the Deserts in kinetoscopic glimpses from the Pullman's windows; the Ocean—God forgive us!—from the beach of a "resort" or the deck of an Atlantic "greyhound." And I think the gods of the Mountains, Rivers, Deserts, and Oceans must laugh in vast contempt of our credulity to suppose that we have found their secrets or heard their music in this timid, furtive peeping and pilfering. For such little minds as these the gods have inexhaustible stores of tinkling cymbals and sounding brasses—Brummagem ware that they sell us for the price of "commutation tickets" and mileage books.

The real knowledge, the real experience that tautens and trims the fibres of being, that tunes the cords, is a very different matter. The trail and the tall ship lead to those places where the Master-note sounds, lead to those untracked, uncharted corners of the earth, and dull indeed must be the tympanum that once within ear-shot can not hear its majestic diapason. It sounds in the canyons of the higher mountains, in the plunge of streams and swirling of rivers yet without names—in the wildernesses, the plains, the wide-rimmed deserts. It sings a sonorous rhapsody in the rigging of the clipper ship driven by the trade winds, in the ratlines and halyards of South Sea schooners, and drums "reveille" on the tense, hard sails of the fishing-boats off the "Banks." You can hear it in the cry of the lynx, the chant of the wild goose, the call of the moose, and in the "break" of the salmon in the deeper pools below the cataract. It is in the roar of the landslide and in the drone of the *cicada;* in the war-whoop of the savage and in the stridulating of crickets; in the thunder of the tempest and in the faintest breath of laziest zephyrs.

And the silver cord of our creative faculty—the thing nearest to perfection in all the make-up of our imperfect human nature—responds to this Master-note with the quickness and sensitiveness of music mathematics; responds to it, attunes itself to it, vibrates with its vibration, thrills with its quivering, beats with its rhythm, and tautens itself and freshens itself and lives again with its great pure, elemental life, and the man comes back once more to the world of men with a true-beating heart and a true-hearing ear, so

that he understands once more, so that his living, sensitive, delicately humming instrument trembles responsive to the emotions and impulses and loves and joys and sorrows and fears of his fellows, and the Man writes true and clear, and his message rings with harmony and with melody, with power and with passion of the prophets interpreting God's handwriting to the world of men.

III

THERE can be no question nor reasonable doubt that the "language, institutions, and religion" of fiction writers are at present undergoing the most radical revolution in the history of literature. And I mean by that that the men themselves are changing—their characters, their attitudes toward life; even the mode and manner of their own life. Those who are not thus changing are decaying. And those others, the Great Unarrived who do not recognize the Change, who do not acknowledge the Revolution, will never succeed, but will perish untimely almost before they can be said to have been born at all.

Time was when the author was an aristocrat, living in seclusion, unspotted from the world. But the Revolution of which there is question here has meted out to him the fate that Revolutions usually prepare for Aristocrats, and his successor is, must be, *must* be—if he is to voice the spirit of the times aright, if he is to interpret his fellows justly—the Man of the People, the Good Citizen.

How the novelists of the preceding generation played the Great Game is no matter for discussion here. Times were different then. One shut one's self in the study; one wore a velvet coat; one read a great deal and quoted Latin; one knew the classics; one kept apart from the vulgar profane and never, never, never read the newspapers. But for the novelist of the next fifty years of this twentieth century these methods, these habits, this conception of literature as a cult, as a refinement to be kept inviolate from the shoulderings and elbowings of the Common People is a clog, is a stumbling-block, is a pitfall, a bog, mire, trap—anything you like that is false, misleading and pernicious.

I have no patience with a theory of literature—and, oh, how often one hears it preached!—that claims the Great Man belongs only to the cultured few. "You must write," so these theorists explain, "for that small number of fine minds who because of education, because of delicate, fastidious taste are competent to judge." I tell you this is wrong. It is precisely the same purblind prejudice that condemned the introduction of the printing-press because it would cheapen and vulgarize the literature of the day. A litera-

ture that can not be vulgarized is no literature at all and will perish just as surely as rivers run to the sea. The things that last are the understandable things—understandable to the common minds, the Plain People, understandable, one is almost tempted to say, to the very children.

It is so in every branch of art: in music, painting, sculpture, architecture. The great monuments of these activities, the things that we retain longest and cherish with the most care, are plain almost to bareness. The most rudimentary mind can understand them. All the learning, all the culture, all the refinement in the world will not give you a greater thrill on reading your "Iliad" than the boy of fifteen enjoys. Is the "Marseillaise" a thing of sublety or refinement? Are the Pyramids complex? Are Angelo's Sibyls involved? But the "Iliad," the "Marseillaise," the Pyramids, the Sibyls will endure and endure and endure while men have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to be moved. These great things, these monuments were *not* written nor composed, nor builded, nor painted for the select, for the cultured. When Homer wrote there were no reading circles. Rouget de Lisle gave no "recitals." One does not have to "read up" to understand the message of Cheops, nor take a course of art lectures to feel the mystery of the Delphic Sibyl.

And so to come back to the starting place, the Revolution in the character of the writer of fiction. If the modern novelist does not understand the Plain People, if he does not address himself directly to them intelligibly and simply, he will fail. But he will never understand them by shutting himself away from them. He must be —and here one comes to the conclusion of the whole matter—a Man of the World. None more so. Books have no place in his equipment, have no right to be there; will only cumber and confuse him. His predecessor never read the newspapers, but for him the newspaper is more valuable than all the tomes of Ruskin, all the volumes of Carlyle. And more valuable than all are the actual, vital Affairs of Men. The function of the novelist of this present day is to comment upon life as he sees it. He can not get away from this; this is his excuse for existence, the only claim he has upon attention. How necessary then for him—of all men—to be in the midst of life! He can not plunge too deeply into it. Politics will help him, and Religious Controversies, Explorations, Science, the newest theory of Socialism, the latest development of Biology. He should find an interest in Continental diplomacy and should have opinions on the chances of a Russo-Japanese war over the Corean question.

He should be able to tell why it is of such unusual importance for Queen Wilhelmina of Holland to give birth to an heir, and should know who ought to be nominated for Governor of his native State at the next convention.

No piece of information—mere downright acquisition of fact—need be considered worthless. Nothing is too trivial to be neglected. I know a novelist of international reputation who told me that the following little bits of knowledge (collected heaven knows where and stored up for years in some pigeon-hole of his memory) had been of use to him in the composition of a novel he is now at work upon: That great cities tend to grow to the westward; that race-horses are shod with a long and narrow shoe; and that the usual price charged by an electrician for winding an armature is four dollars. And he seemed prouder of the fact that he had these tiny odds and ends at his command, when needed, than he was of the honorary degree just conferred upon him by Harvard University.

I suppose this is an exaggerated case, and it is not to be denied that it is better to have a Harvard degree than to know the shape of a race-horse's shoe, but it surely goes to prove the point that, as far as actual material worth and use were concerned, the fugitive foolish memory-notes were of more present help than the university degree, and that so far as information is concerned the novelist can not know too much.

In a recent number of "The Bookman" there appears an able article under the title "Attacking the Newspapers." The title is a trifle misleading, since the author's point and text are a defence of modern journalism, or rather let us say an apology. The apology is very well done. The manner of presentation is ingenious, the style amusing, but none the less one can not let the article pass without protest or, at the least, comment.

The original function of a newspaper was, and still should be, to tell the news—and, if you please, nothing more than that. The "policy" of the paper was (before the days of the yellow press) advocated and exploited in the editorial columns.

The whole difficulty lies in the fact that nowadays the average newspaper is violently partisan and deliberately alters news to suit its partisanship. "Not a very criminal procedure," I hear it said; "for by reading the opposition papers the public gets the other side." But one submits that such a course *is* criminal, and that it can be proved to be such. How many people do you suppose read the "op-

position" papers? The American newspaper readers have not time to read "both sides" unless presented to them in one and the same paper.

Observe now how this partisanship works injustice and ruin. Let us suppose a given newspaper is hostile to the Governor of the State. Now every man—even a journalist—has a right to his opinions and his hostilities, and important men in public life must expect to be abused. There are for them compensations; their position is too high, too secure to be shaken by the vituperation of malevolent journals. But these journals have one favorite form of attacking important public men which, though it does not always harm the personage assaulted, may easily ruin the subordinates with which he surrounds himself. This is the habit of discrediting the statesman by defaming his appointees. The Governor, we will say, has appointed John Smith to be the head of a certain institution of the State. But the Governor has incurred the enmity of the "Daily Clarion"—the leading newspaper. Promptly the "Clarion" seizes upon Smith. His career as head of the institution has been a record of misrule (so the "Clarion" reads), has been characterized by extravagance, incompetency, mismanagement, and even misappropriation of the State's money. And here begins the cruel injustice of the business. The editor of that paper will set no bounds upon the lengths to which he will urge his reporters in their vilification of Smith. The editor knows he is a liar, the reporters know they are liars, but the public, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, ignoring motives, unable to see that the real object of attack is the Governor, unable to understand the brute callousness and wretched hypocrisy of the whole proceeding, *believes the calumny,* believes that Smith is an incompetent, a spendthrift, even a thief. And even the better class of readers, even the more intelligent who make allowances for the paper's political prejudices, will listen to the abuse and believe that there "must be some fire where there is so much smoke." Do you suppose for one moment that Smith will ever get a hearing in that paper? Do you suppose its reporters will ever credit him with a single honest achievement, a single sincere effort? If you do, you do not understand modern journalism.

Ah, but the opposition papers! They will defend Smith. They will champion him as vehemently as the "Clarion" attacks. That is all very well, but suppose there are no opposition papers. Politics are very complicated. The press of a given community is not

always equally divided between the Republican and Democratic parties. Time and time again it happens that all the leading newspapers of a city, a county, or even a State, Democratic, Republican, Independent, etc., are banded together to oppose some one Large Man.

Where then will Smith get his hearing? He can not fight all the newspapers at once. He is not strong enough to retaliate even upon the meanest. The papers are afraid of nothing he can do. They hold absolute power over his good name and reputation. And for the sake of feeding fat the grudge they bear the Great One they butcher the subordinate without ruth and without reproach Believe me, it has been shown repeatedly that, placed in such a position, the modern newspaper will check at no lie however monstrous, at no calumny however vile. If Smith holds a position of trust he will be trumpeted from end to end of the community as a defaulter, gambling away the public moneys intrusted to his care. He will be pictured as a race-track follower, a supporter of fast women, a thief, a blackguard, and a reprobate. If he holds an administrative office, it will be shown how he has given and taken bribes; how he has neglected his duties and ignored his responsibilities till his office has engendered calamity, ruin, and even actual physical suffering. If his work is in the nature of supervision over one of those State institutions where the helpless are cared for—the infirm, the imbecile, the aged, or sick, or poor—his cruelty to his wards will be the theme, and he will be written of and pictured as whipping or torturing old men and little children, imprisoning, tormenting, making a hell of what was meant to be a help.

And the man once blackened after this fashion will never again rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the public. The people who read newspapers always believe the worst, and when an entire press, or even the major part of it, unite to defame a man there is no help or redress possible. He is ruined, ruined professionally and financially, ruined in character, in pocket, and in the hopes of ever getting back the good name that once was his.

And all this is done merely as a political move, merely to discredit the Big Man who put Smith in his place, merely to hurt his chances of renomination, merely to cut down the number of his votes. It is butchery; there is no other word than this with which to characterize the procedure, butchery as cruel, as wanton and as outrageous as ever bloodied the sands of the Colosseum. It is

even worse than this, for the victim has no chance for his life. His hands are tied before the beasts are loosed. He is trussed and downed before the cages are opened, and the benches thunder for his life, not as for a victim to be immolated, but as a criminal to be punished. He is getting only his deserts, his very memory is an execration, and his name whenever mentioned is a by-word and a hissing.

And this in face of the fact that the man may be as innocent of the charges urged as if he had never been born.

Yet Doctor Colby in "The Bookman" article writes: "If we must attack the newspapers let it be as critics, not as crusaders, for the people who write for them are under no stricter obligations than ourselves." What! the reporter or the editor who by some fillip of fortune is in a position to make public opinion in the minds of a million people under no more obligations than you and I! If ever obligation bore down with an all but intolerable weight it is in just his case. His responsibility is greater than that of the Pulpit, greater than that of the Physician, greater than that of the Educator. If you would see the use to which it is put, you have only to try to get at the real truth in the case of the next public character assailed and vilified in the public prints.

Doctor Colby is wrong. It *is* a crusade and *not* a criticism that will put down the modern yellow newspaper from the bad eminence to which the minds of the hysterical, of the violent, of the ignorant, brutal and unscrupulous have exalted it.

IV

THERE is a certain journal of the Middle West of the United States which has proclaimed, with a great flourish of trumpets, that Mme. Humbert of Paris would have made a great "fictionist" if she had not elected to become a great swindler. This is that Mme. Humbert who cheated a number of bankers, capitalists and judges out of a great deal of money with a story of $20,000,000 in a safe which for certain reasons she could not open. Very naturally, when her hand was forced the safe was empty. And this person, the Middle West paper claims, is a great novelist *manquée*, "a female Dumas or Hugo." The contention would not be worthy of notice were it not for the fact that it is an opinion similar to that held by a great number of people intelligent enough to know better. In a word, it is the contention that the personal morality of the artist (including "fictionists") has nothing to do with his work, and that a great rascal may be a good painter, good musician, good novelist. With painters, musicians and the like this may or may not be true. With the novelist one contends, believes and avers that it is absolutely and unequivocally false, and that the mind capable of theft, of immorality, of cruelty, of foulness, or falseness of any kind is incapable, under any circumstances, or by any degree of stimulation, of producing one single important, artistic or useful piece of fiction. The better the personal morality of the writer, the better his writings. Tolstoi, for instance: it is wholly and solely due to the man's vast goodness and philanthropy that his novels carry weight. The attitude of the novelist toward his fellow-men and women is the great thing, not his inventiveness, his ingenuity, his deftness, or glibness, or verbal dexterity. And the mind wholly mean, who would rob a friend of $40,000 (after the manner of the Humbert person), or could even wilfully and deliberately mar the pleasure of a little child, could never assume toward the world at large that attitude of sympathy and generosity and toleration that is the first requisite of the really great novelist. Always you will find this thing true: that the best, the greatest writers of fiction are those best loved of troops of friends; and for the reason that,

like the Arab philosopher of the poem, they, first of all, have "loved their fellow-men." It is this that has made their novels great. Consider Stevenson, or our own "Dean," or Hugo, or Scott, men of the simplest lives, uncompromising in rectitude, scrupulously, punctiliously, Quixotically honest; their morality—surely in the cases of Stevenson and Hugo—setting a new standard of religion, at the least a new code of ethics. And thus it goes right down the line, from the greater lights to the lesser and to the least. It is only the small men, the "minor" people among the writers of books who indulge in eccentricities that are only immoralities under a different skin; who do not pay their debts; who borrow without idea of returning; who live loose, "irregular," wretched, vicious lives, and call it "Bohemianism," and who believe that "good work" can issue from the turmoil, that the honeycomb will be found in the carcass, and the sweet come forth from the putrid. So that in the end one may choose to disagree with the Middle West editor and to affirm that it is not the ingenious criminal who is the novelist *manqué*, but the philanthropist, the great educator, the great pulpit orator, the great statesman. It is from such stuff that the important novels are made, not from the deranged lumber and disordered claptrap of the brain of a defective.

In the course of a speech made at a recent dinner given in London, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace has deplored the fact that our present generation of English writers has produced no worthy successors to the great men of the mid-Victorian period—that there are no names to place beside Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Browning, or Keats. But he also brought forward extenuating circumstances, chief among which was the fact that the novelists of to-day were working overtime to supply the demands of an ever-increasing public, and that, by implication, their work was therefore deteriorating. One does not believe that this is so. Rapid work may cause the deterioration of a commercial article, but it by no means follows that the authors who are called upon to produce a very large number of books are forced into the composition of unworthy literature. The writer's brain does *not* hold the material for his books. It is not like a storehouse, from which things may be taken till nothing remains. The writer's material is life itself, inexhaustible and renewed from day to day, and his brain is only the instrument that adapts life to fiction. True, this instrument itself may wear out after a while, but it usually lasts as long as the man himself, and is good for more work than the unthinking would be-

lieve possible. As a matter of fact, the best novelists have, as a rule, been the most prolific, have been those who had to write rapidly and much to satisfy, if not the demands of the public, then at least other more personal demands, none the less insistent. Scott and Dickens were unusually prolific, yet the rapidity with which they accomplished their work did not hurt the quality of the work itself. Balzac and Dumas produced whole libraries of books and yet kept their standards high. As one has urged before, it is the demand of the People that produces the great writer, not *re*duces the quality and fineness of his work. If he has the "divine spark," the breath of the millions will fan rather than extinguish it.

One does not choose to believe that the art of fiction nor the standards of excellence have deteriorated since the day of Scott, Dickens and Thackeray. True, we have no men to equal them as yet, but they are surely coming. Time was, at the end of the seventeenth century, when the dearth of good fiction was even more marked than at present. But one must bear in mind that progress is never along a direct line, but by action and reaction. A period will supervene when a group of geniuses arise, and during the course of their activities the average of excellence is high, great books are produced, and a whole New Literature is launched. Their influence is profound; the first subschool of imitators follow good enough men but second-rate. These in turn are followed by the third-raters, and these by the fourth-raters, and no one is found bold enough to strike out for himself until the bottom is reached. Then comes the reaction, and once more the group of giants towers up from out the mass. We are probably living through the era of the fourth-raters just now, and one believes that we are rather near to the end even of that. The imitators of the romantic school have imitated to ten places decimals and have diluted and rediluted till they can hardly go further without producing something actually and really new. At any rate, the time is most propitious for a Man of Iron who can be bent to no former shape nor diluted to no old-time essence. Then will come the day of the New Literature, and the wind of Life itself will blow through the dry bones and fustian and sawdust of the Imitation, and the People will all at once realize how very far afield the fourth-raters have drawn them and how very different a good novel is from a bad one.

For say what you will, the People, the Plain People who Read, do appreciate good literature in the end. One must keep one's faith in the People—the Plain People, the Burgesses, the Grocers—

else of all men the artists are most miserable and their teachings vain. Let us admit and concede that this belief is ever so sorely tried at times. Many thousands of years ago the wisest man of his age declared that "the People imagine a vain thing." Continually they are running away after strange gods; continually they are admiring the fake and neglecting actual worth. But in the end, and at last, they will listen to the true note and discriminate between it and the false. *In the last analysis the People are always right.* Somehow, and after all is said and done, they will prefer Walter Scott to G. P. R. James, Shakespeare to Marlowe, Flaubert to Goncourt. Sometimes the preference is long in forming, and during this formative period they have many reversions, and go galloping, in herds of one hundred or one hundred and fifty thousand (swelling the circulations), after false gods. But note this fact: that the fustian and the tinsel and the sawdust are discovered very soon, and, the discovery once made, the sham idol can claim no single devotee.

In other words, it is a comfort to those who take the literature of the American—or even of the Anglo-Saxon—seriously to remember, in the long run and the larger view, that a circulation of two hundred, three hundred or four hundred thousand—judging even by this base-scale of "copies sold"—is not so huge after all. Consider. A "popular" novel is launched and sells its half-million. Within a certain very limited period of time, at most five years, this sale stops definitely and conclusively. The People have found out that it is not such a work of genius after all, and will have no more of it.

But how about the circulation of the works of the real Masters, Scott and Dickens, say—to be more concrete, let us speak of "Ivanhoe" and "David Copperfield"—have not each of these "sold" more than two hundred thousand since publication? Is not two hundred million nearer the mark? And they are still selling. New editions are published every year. Does not this prove that the People are discriminating; that they are—after all—preferring the best literature to the mediocre; that they are not such a mindless herd after all; that in the end, in fine, they are always right? It will not do to decry the American public; to say that it has no taste, no judgment; that it "likes to be fooled." It may be led away for a time by clamorous advertising and the "barking" of fakirs. But there comes a day when it will no longer be fooled. A million dollars' worth of advertising would not to-day sell a hundred thou-

sand copies of "Trilby." But "Ivanhoe" and "Copperfield," without advertising, without *réclames* for exploitation, are as marketable this very day as a sack of flour or a bag of wheat.

Mr. Metcalfe, in a recent issue of "Life," has been lamenting the lack of good plays on the American stage during the past season, and surely no one can aver that the distinguished critic is not right. One can not forbear a wince or two at the thought of what future art historians will say in their accounts of the American drama at the beginning of the twentieth century. Frankly and unreservedly the native American drama is just about as bad as it can be, and every intelligent-minded person is quite willing to say so. The causes are not difficult to trace. Two come to the mind at once, which in themselves alone would account for the degeneracy—*i. e.*, the rage for Vaudeville and the exploitation of the Star. The first has developed in the last ten years, an importation from English music halls. Considered at first as a fad by the better class of theatre-goers, a thing to be countenanced with amused toleration like performing bears and the animal circus, it has been at length boosted and foisted upon the public attention till, like a veritable cancer, it has eaten almost into the very vitals of the Legitimate Comedy (using the word in its technical sense). Continually nowadays one may see a "specialty"—generally in the form of a dance—lugged in between the scenes of a perfectly sober, perfectly sane Comedy of Manners. The moment any one subordinate feature of a dramatic action is developed at the expense of *vraisemblance* and the Probabilities, and for the sake of amusing the galleries, there is the first bacillus of decay. Vaudeville is all very well by itself, and one will even go so far as to admit that it has its place as much as an Ibsen problem-play. But it should keep to that place. It is ludicrously *out* of place in a comedy—quite as much so as the "Bible Incident" in "Ebbsmith" would be in a Hoyt farce. But because the "specialty" because Vaudeville, will "go" with the "gallery" at any time and at any place, the manager and—the pity of it!—the author, too, will introduce it whenever the remotest possibility occurs, and by just so much the tone of the whole drama is lowered. It has got to such a pass by now, however, that one ought to be thankful if this same "tone" is not keyed down to the specialty.

But the exploiting of the Star, it would seem, is, of all others, the great cause of the mediocrity of present-day dramatic literature. One has but to glance at the theatre programmes and bills to see how matters stand. The name of the leading lady or leading

man is "scare-headed" so that the swiftest runner can not fail to see. Even the manager proclaims his patronymic in enormous "caps." But the author!—as often as not *his* name is not discoverable at all. The play is nothing—thus it would seem the managers would have us believe—it is the actress, her speeches, her scenes, her gowns, her personality, that are the all-important essentials. It is notorious how plays are cut, and readjusted, and dislocated to suit the Star. Never mind whether or not the scene is artistic, is vivid, is dramatic. Does the Star get the best of it? If not, write it over. The Star must have all the good lines. If they can not be built into the Star's part, cut 'em out. The Probabilities, the construction, artistic effect, climax, even good, common, forthright horse sense, rot 'em! who cares for 'em? Give the Star the lime-light—that's the point.

If the audience is willing to pay its money to see Miss Marlowe, Miss Mannering, or Mrs. Carter put through her paces, that's another thing; but let us not expect that good dramas will issue forth from this state of affairs.

Where are the Books for Girls? Adults' books there are and books for boys by the carload, but where is the book for the young girls? Something has already been said about literature for the amiable young woman, but this, now, is a very different person. One means the girl of fourteen to eighteen. The boy passing through this most trying formative period finds his literature ready to hand. Boys' books, tales of hunting, adventure and sport abound. They are good books, too, sane, "healthy," full of fine spirit and life. But the girl, where does she read? Surely the years between fourteen and eighteen are even more trying to a young girl than to a boy. She is not an active animal. When the boy is out-of-doors, pitching curves or "running the ends," the girl (even yet in the day and age of "athletics for women") is in the house, and, as like as not, reading. And reading what, if you please? The feeblest, thinnest, most colorless lucubrations that it is given to the mind of misguided man to conceive or to perpetuate. It must be this or else the literature of the adult; and surely the novels written for mature minds, for men and women who have some knowledge of the world and powers of discrimination, are not good reading, in any sense of the word, for a sixteen-year-old girl in the formative period of her life.

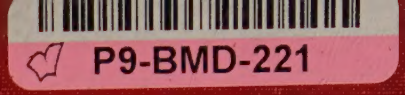
Besides Alcott, no one has ever written intelligently for girls. Surely there is a field here. Surely a Public, untried and unex-

plored, is waiting for its author; nor is it a public wanting in enthusiasm, loyalty or intelligence.

But for all this great parade and prating of emancipated women it nevertheless remains a fact that the great majority of twentieth-century opinion is virtually Oriental in its conception of the young girl. The world to-day is a world for boys, men and women. Of all humans, the young girl, the sixteen-year-old, is the least important—or, at least, is so deemed. Wanted: a Champion. Wanted: the Discoverer and Poet of the Very Young Girl. Unimportant she may now appear to you, who may yet call her by her first name without fear and without reproach. But remember this, you who believe only in a world of men and boys and women; the Very Young Girl of to-day is the woman of to-morrow, the wife of the day after, and the mother of next week. She only needs to put up her hair and let down her frocks to become a very important person indeed. Meanwhile, she has no literature; meanwhile, *faute de mieux,* she is trying to read Ouida and many other books intended for maturer minds; or, worse than all, she is enfeebling her mind by the very thin gruel purveyed by the mild-mannered gentlemen and ladies who write for the Sunday-school libraries. Here is a bad business; here is a field that needs cultivation. All very well to tend and train the saplings, the oaks and the vines. The flowers—they have not bloomed yet—are to be thought about, too.

All the more so that the young girls takes a book to heart infinitely more than a boy. The boy—*his* story once read—votes it "bully," takes down his cap, and there's an end. But the average Very Young Girl does not read her story: she lives it, lingers over it, weeps over it, lies awake nights over it. So long as she lives she will never quite forget the books she read when she was sixteen. It is not too much to say that the "favorite" books of a girl at this age become a part of her life. They influence her character more than any of us, I imagine, would suspect or admit. All the more reason, then, that there should not only be good books for girls, but plenty of good books.

THE END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